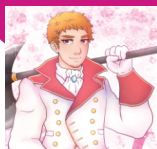
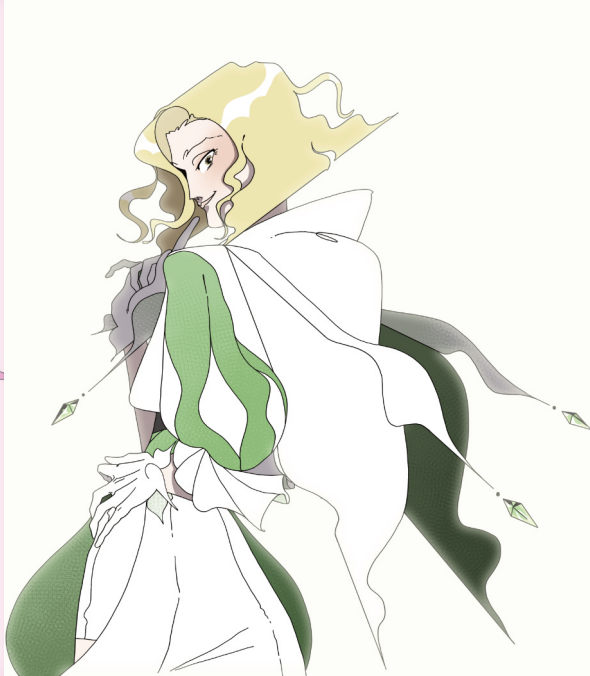


In the Name of Love

A Zine Celebrating
Ten Years of
Boueibu!



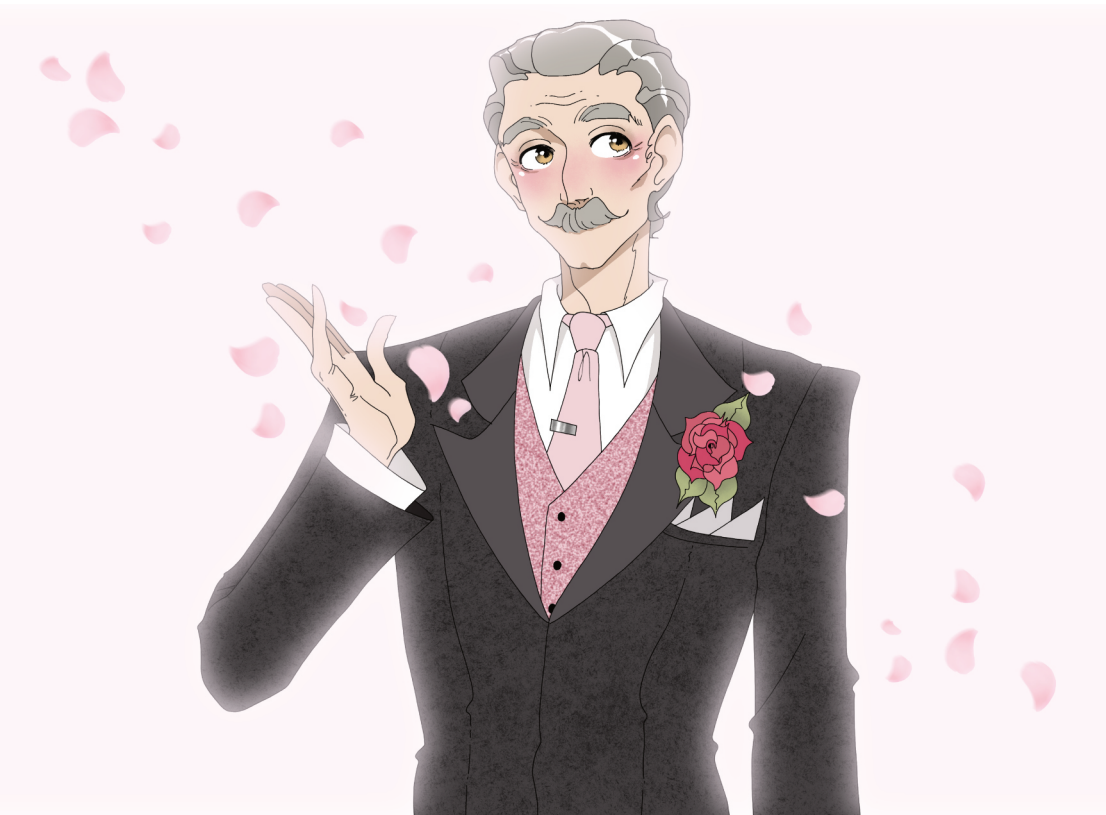


Ichiro, Nanao, and Tawarayama - P3ngu



Kinshirou and Atsushi - Lidoxia

Akoya - ripsensei





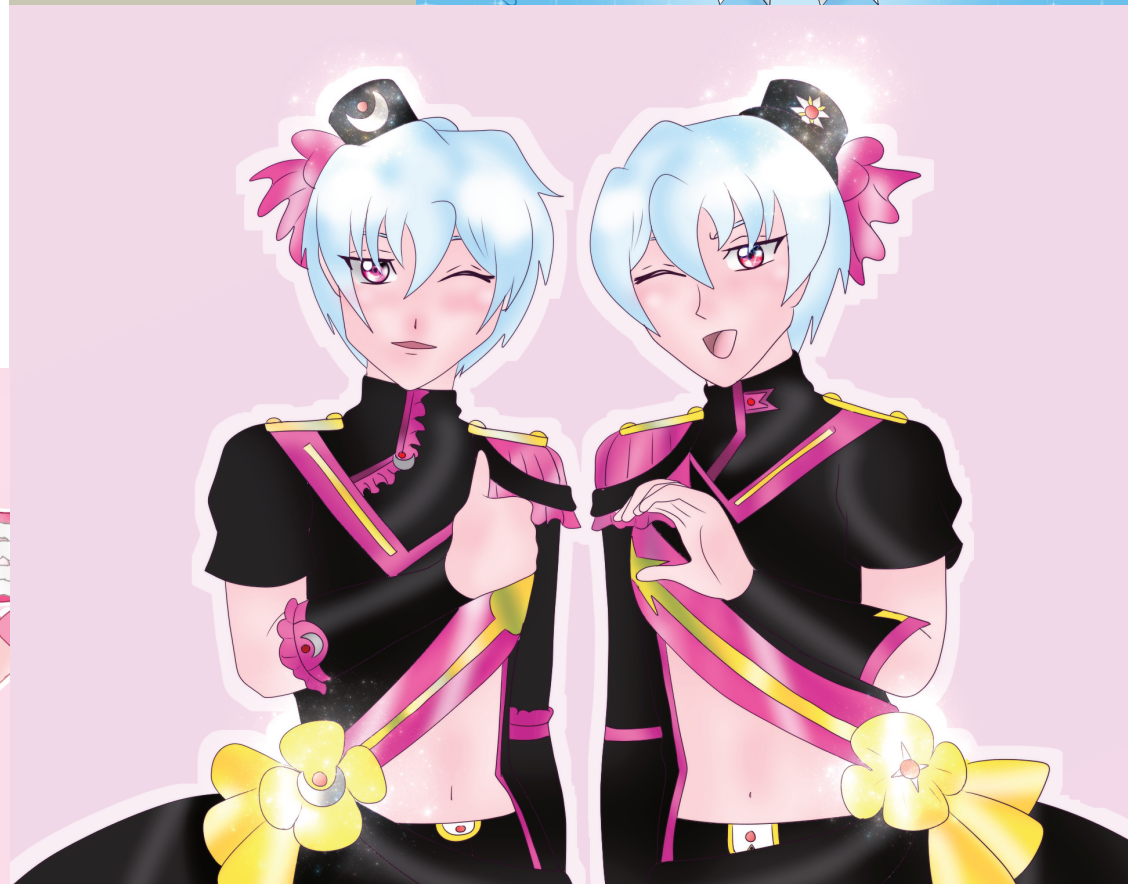
Io - Endstarlight

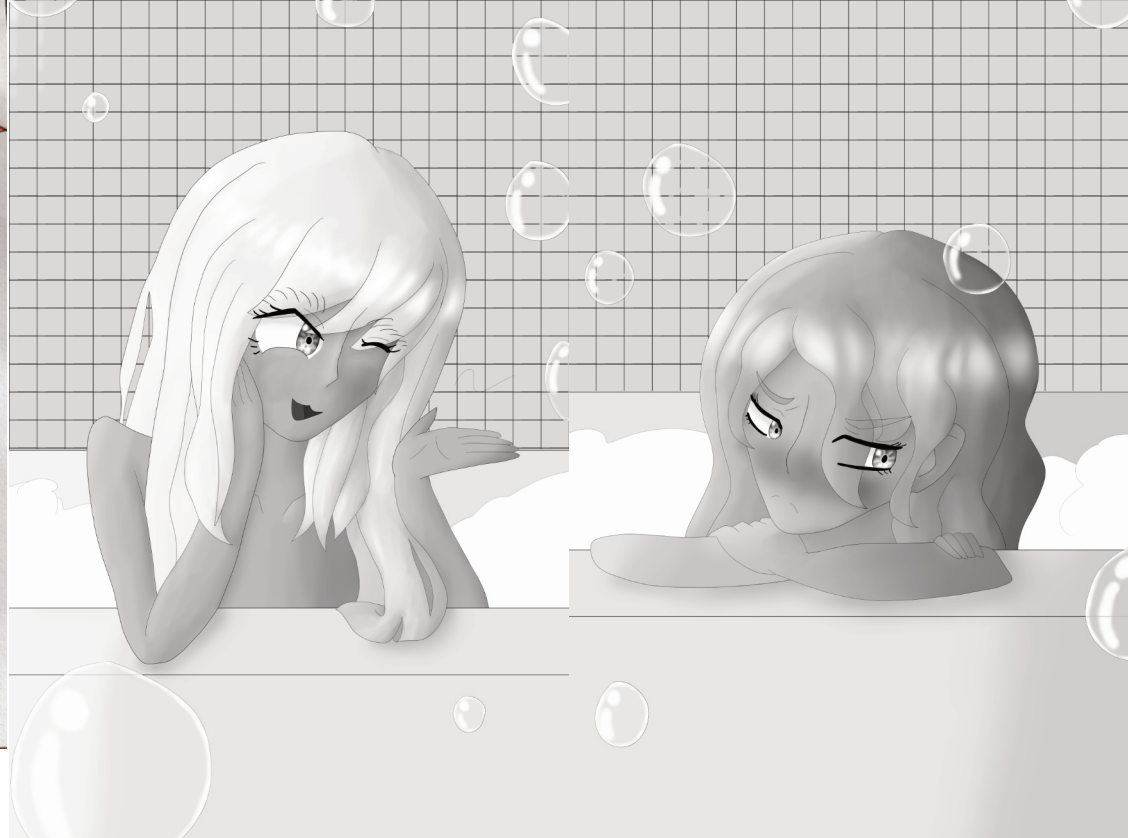
Taishi and Ibushi - Venla

Yumoto and Ryuu - Adri

En - Angellizz

Aki and Haru - Adri and Angellizz



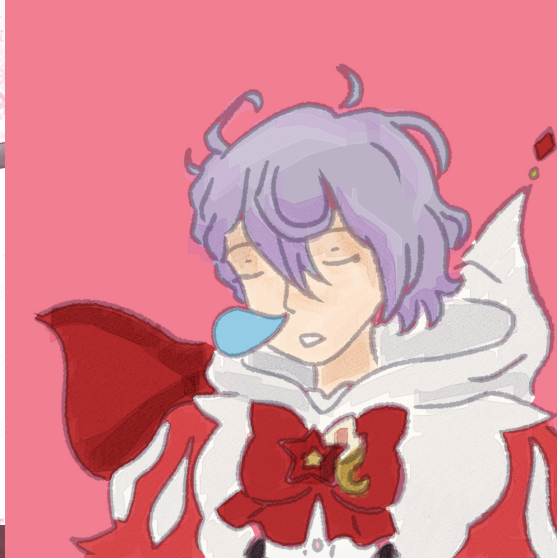


Wombat, Ryouma, and
Martha
- Mercy

Karurusu and
Furanui
- Serenity

Zundar and
Hashibiro
- Pink Fluffy Dragon





Gora and Dadacha
- Toby-Senpai

Taiju
- Serenity and Midori

Kyoutarou and Ata
- Erika

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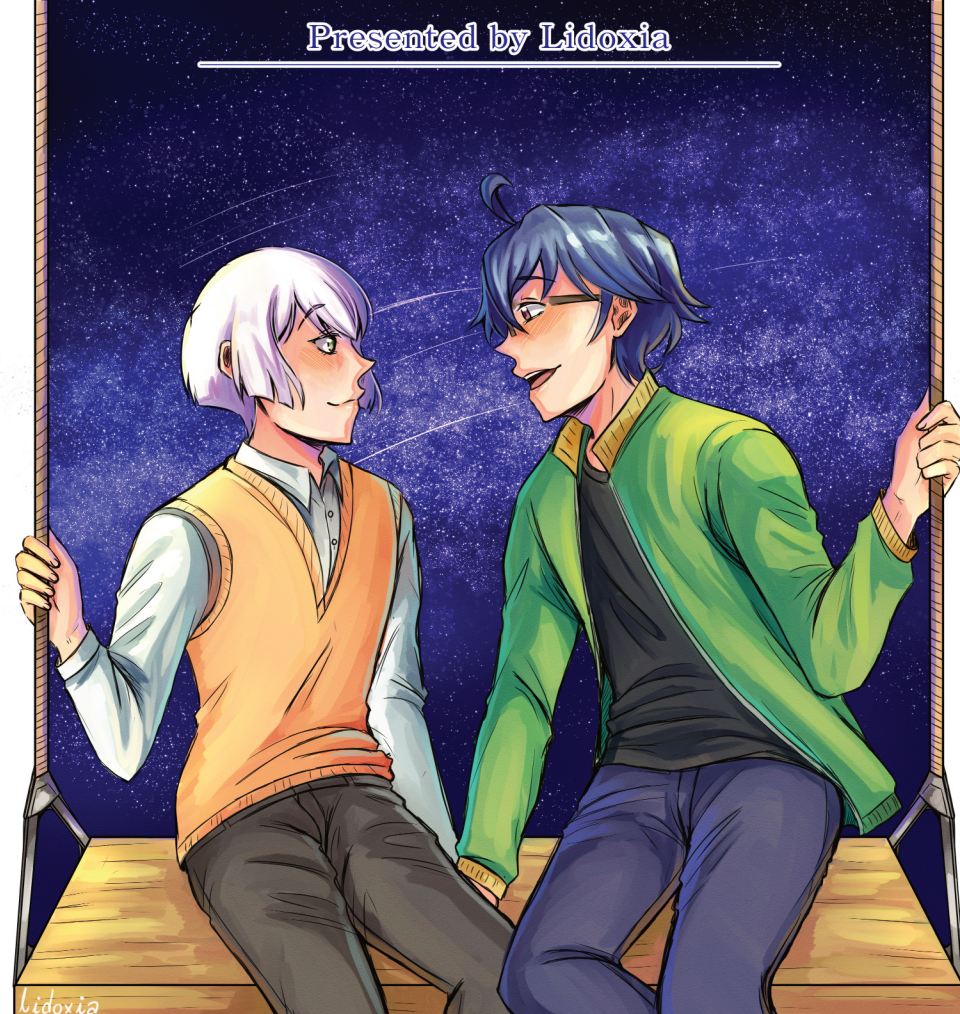
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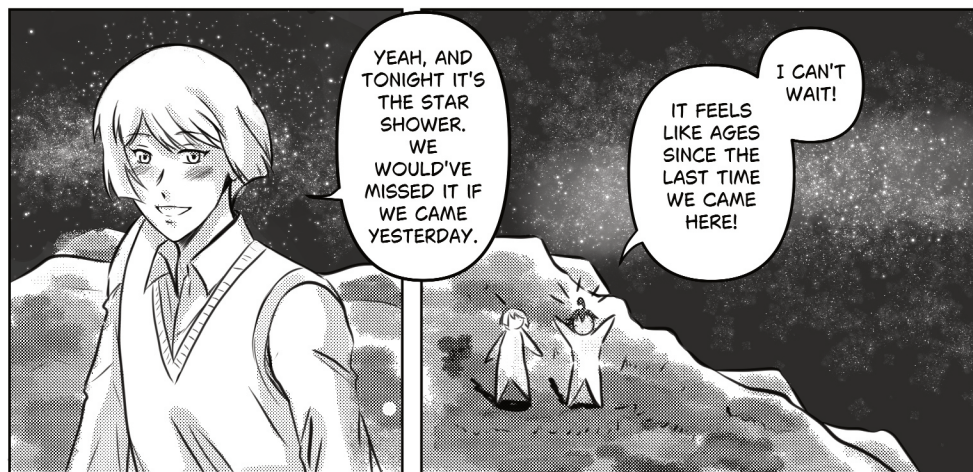


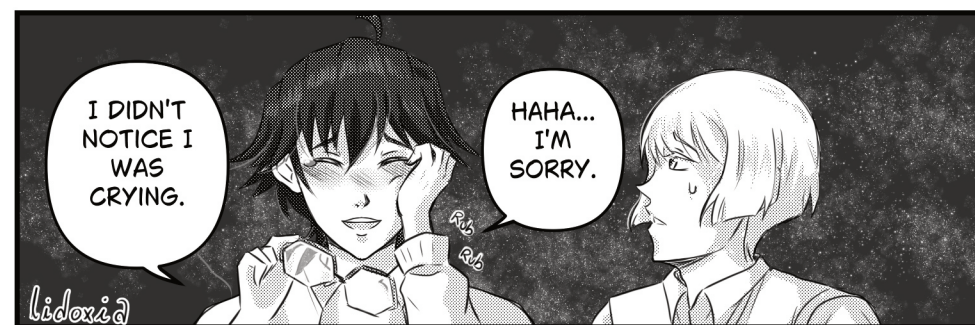
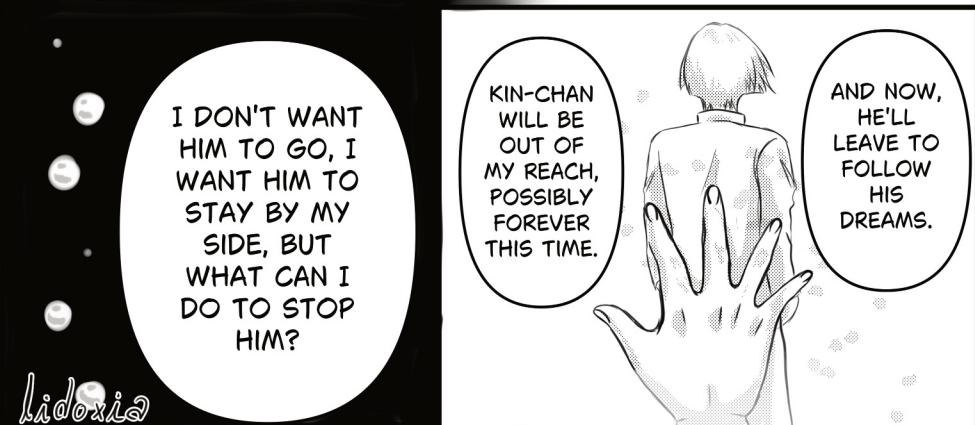
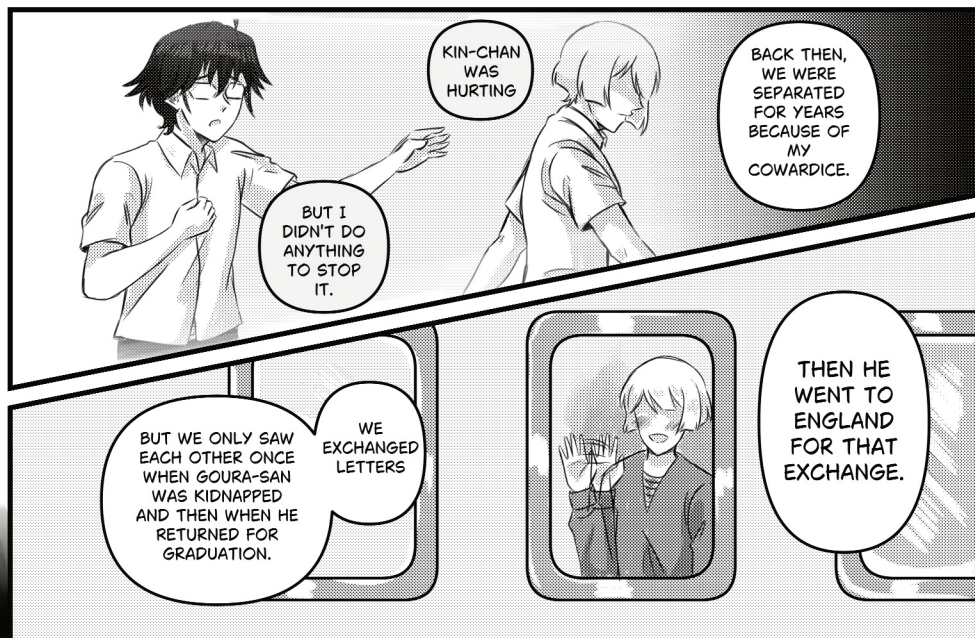
Presented by Lidoxia

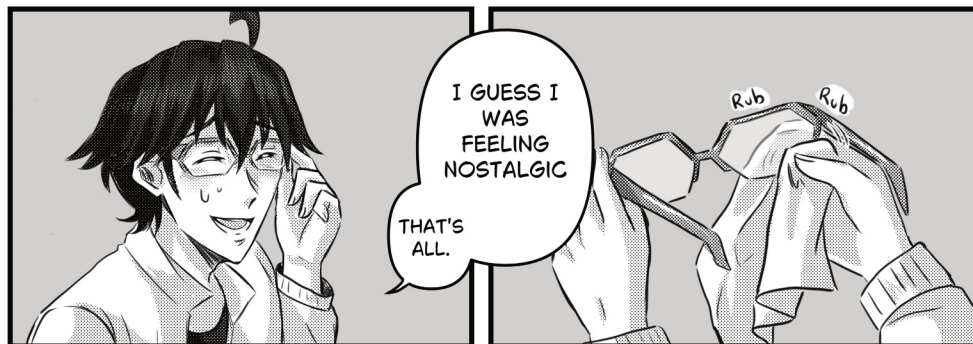


Wishing Upon A Star

Boueibu Unofficial Fanbook #2
Atsushi x Kinshiro

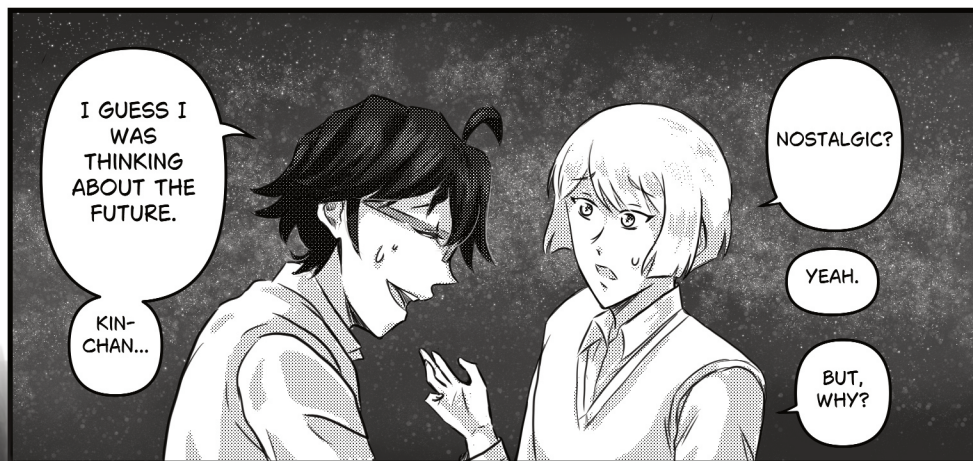






I GUESS I WAS FEELING NOSTALGIC

THAT'S ALL.



I GUESS I WAS THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE.

KIN-CHAN...

NOSTALGIC?

YEAH.

BUT, WHY?



"I DON'T WANT YOU TO LEAVE MY SIDE."

I WANT TO TELL YOU THAT, BUT I CAN'T.



I THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE. ABOUT HOW QUICKLY THIS SCHOOL YEAR HAS GONE BY. WE'VE JUST MADE UP, AND WE'LL GET SEPARATED AGAIN.

I'M EXCITED ABOUT THE FUTURE, TOO

BUT...

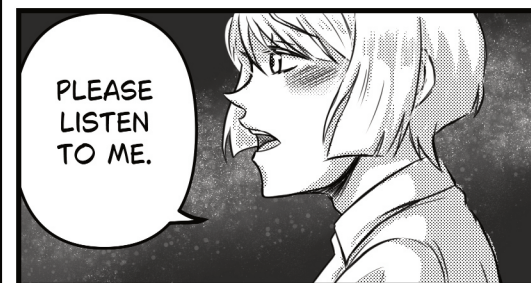
lidoxia



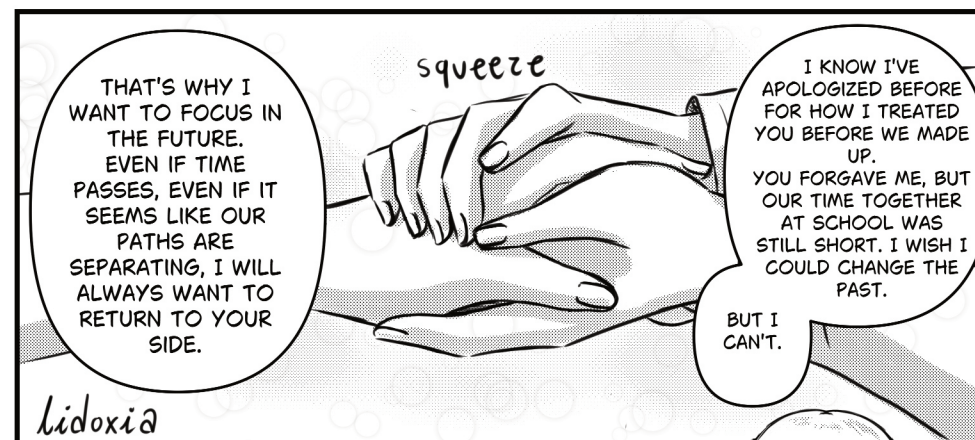
NO MATTER WHAT, I PROMISE I WON'T LEAVE YOUR SIDE.



AT-CHAN,



PLEASE LISTEN TO ME.



THAT'S WHY I WANT TO FOCUS IN THE FUTURE. EVEN IF TIME PASSES, EVEN IF IT SEEMS LIKE OUR PATHS ARE SEPARATING, I WILL ALWAYS WANT TO RETURN TO YOUR SIDE.

I KNOW I'VE APOLOGIZED BEFORE FOR HOW I TREATED YOU BEFORE WE MADE UP. YOU FORGAVE ME, BUT OUR TIME TOGETHER AT SCHOOL WAS STILL SHORT. I WISH I COULD CHANGE THE PAST.

BUT I CAN'T.

lidoxia



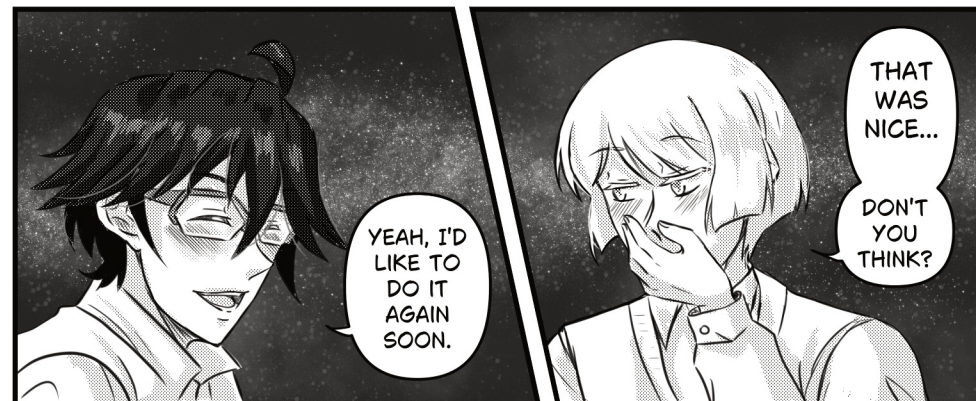
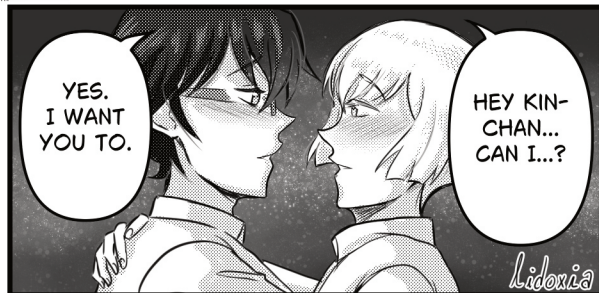
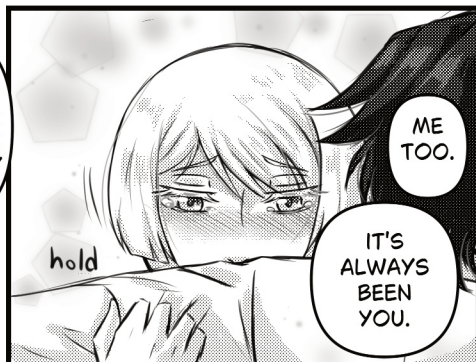
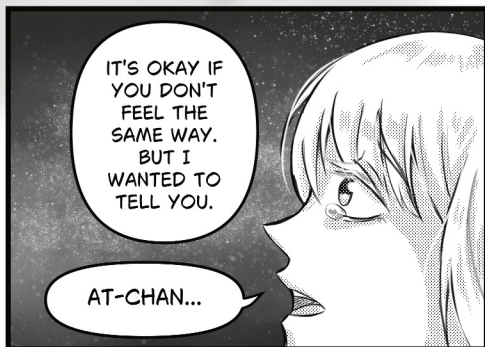
IF YOU WANT.

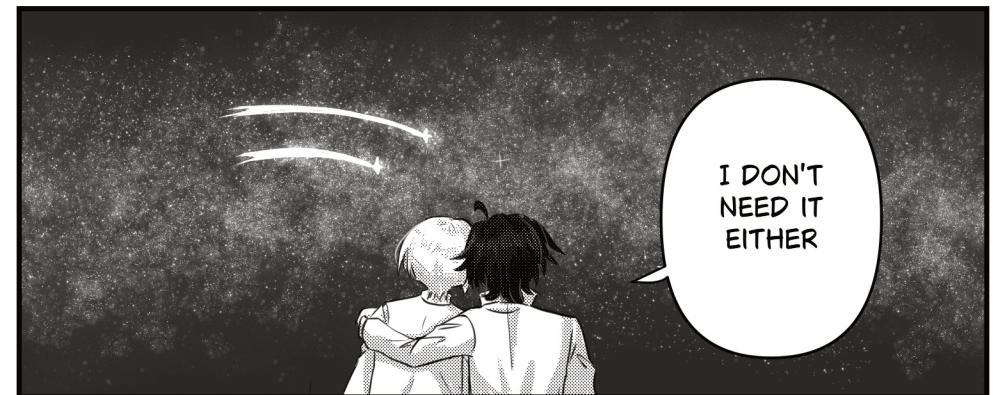
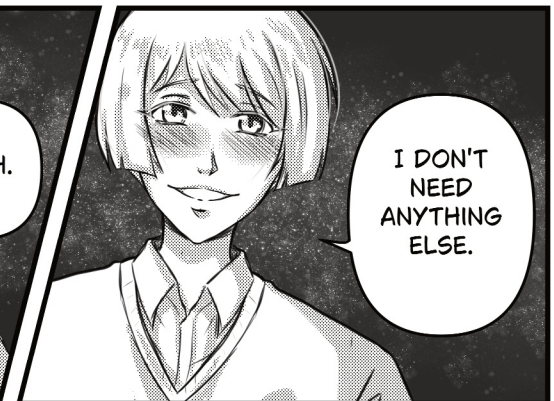
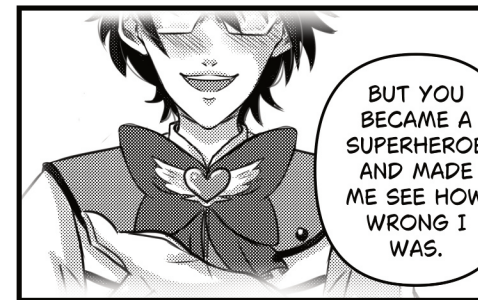
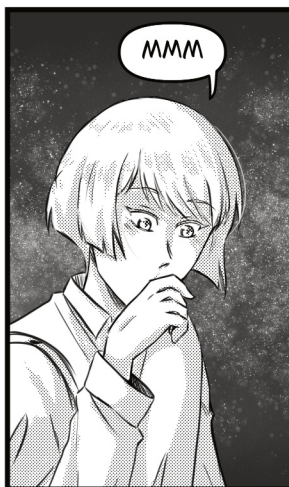
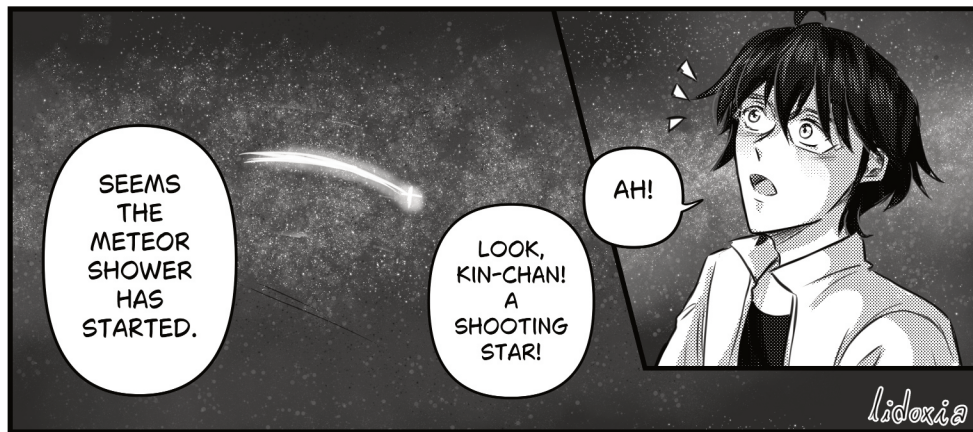


I WON'T LET YOU GO NO MATTER WHAT. I PROMISE YOU THAT!

THERE'S ANOTHER SELFISH REASON WHY I WANT YOU BY MY SIDE.

IF YOU HATE ME THAT'S OKAY.







Countdown to Happy Love!

Cricket

8:00 a.m.

Yumoto was rushing around the onsen in a flurry, and the day had barely begun. Gora watched in amusement as Yumoto fluttered about from task to task, getting a few things part way done on each before remembering the next thing and rushing in that direction. Gora, in contrast, was slowly and methodically sweeping and mopping the floor in the main areas of the onsen. His next task would be to do the same thing in the baths themselves, and then finally, in the banquet room. They had plenty of time to achieve everything they wanted to today, Yumoto just needed to direct his energy.

"We took the liberty of posting your closed sign out front," a cool, even voice cut in, and Gora looked up to see their friends, Akihiko and Haruhiko, standing in the entryway.

He set the broom aside and held out his arms wide, and the two younger men rushed over for a hug.

"Aki-chan! Haru-chan!" Yumoto came squealing around the corner and crashed into the group hug. "I'm so glad you're here! But you're so early!"

"Well," Haruhiko answered drily, "Dadacha thought you two might want some help getting everything set up, so here we are."

"And by the looks of it," Akihiko added, "He was right."

Dadacha peeked out from the bag Haruhiko had slung over his shoulder. "I'm here to help, too! What needs to be cooked?"

Yumoto inhaled deeply, and Gora patted him on the shoulder. "We made a list, remember?"

"Yes!" Yumoto twirled away from the group to point at the list he and Gora had posted on the doorway. "Here's everything we need to do today!"

Akihiko followed, leaning forward with his hands clasped behind his back to look at the list. Dadacha scampered out of Haruhiko's bag and up the shoulder strap, then jumped from Haruhiko's shoulder to the top of Gora's head. From there, he launched himself after Akihiko, gliding over to snag onto the back of Yumoto's t-shirt.

"Yumoto," Haruhiko chuckled, "How do you have just as much energy as when we first met?"

Yumoto laughed brightly at that, and exclaimed "Only on special days! And today is definitely special!"

Yumoto still looked so young when he laughed, but after Haruhiko's comment Gora couldn't help but remember how small he had been back as a first year in high school. He was taller and broader now, with a sharper jawline. Somewhere in the almost fifteen years since then, his little brother really had grown up.

"So," Gora said, "Let's get back to work. We have time, but we still have plenty to do." He picked up his broom again, and listened as Yumoto, Akihiko, Haruhiko, and Dadacha bickered over how to divide up all their tasks. Soon, Dadacha scampered back into the

kitchen to begin preparing some of the food, while Akihiko settled in to make a sign to hang on the front door to indicate that the onsen was closed for a special event. Haruhiko headed to the baths to get started on their deep clean, and Yumoto burst into a flurry of activity again. Gora still wasn't sure exactly what he was working on at any given moment, but it certainly seemed like things were getting done. And with the Beppu brothers and Dadacha here to help, they were sure to finish far ahead of schedule.

Once the entryway was done, Gora moved into the baths to make sure they were spick and span. Haruhiko wasn't there, but all the dirty towels were missing, so Gora had a pretty good idea of where he had gone off to. He started on the shower area, making sure all the stools and soap were in place, and that everything was clean.

A series of sharp raps drew his attention to the door that led to the outdoor area. He set down his cleaning rag and wiped his hands dry on his pants as he walked over to pull it open. A grin split his face when he saw the giant blue shoebill standing just outside. "Hashibiro! I didn't know if you were going to make it."

The bird ruffled his wings in a way that gave the impression of a shrug. "It's been too long since I've seen you, old friend."

Gora opened the door wider to let him in. "Your old spot is still out in the lobby, if you want to settle in and keep us company. We're just cleaning and getting everything ready now."

Hashibiro moved past Gora, stepping carefully with his long, spindly legs. "That

sounds perfect. Of course if I can help with anything, please do let me know."

8:45 a.m.

💧 I demand your presence posthaste!!!

💧 Will you make it worth our time?

💧 can't wait until tonight to see us? 😊

💧 Refreshments provided and my undying gratitude 🙏

💧 I can be there around 10!

💧 That time is acceptable to me as well.

💧 what is so urgent anyway?

💧 I can't decide what to wear and my hair is a mess

💧 of course 😊

9:00 a.m.

It was far too early in the day for this, and here he was anyway. Kyotaro yawned as he curled his fist to knock on Ryoma's door, leaving his hand down by his side. Too much effort to raise his fist all the way when the door was right there. The door swung open almost immediately, revealing a tall man with a severe facial expression.

"Oh, Ata, you're here already," Kyotaro said.

"And you're late," Ata responded, tossing his hair back over his shoulder. Kyotaro leaned into his space and Ata stepped backwards, hastily, allowing Kyotaro into the apartment.

"I bet you were early, Ata, I'm not too far

behind," Kyotaro responded as he slipped off his shoes.

Ata's face flushed just the slightest pink, but he just turned away. "Well, come on, Ryoma's in the kitchen," he said as he disappeared around the corner.

Kyotaro followed, and barely had enough time to see that his friends were standing at the counter looking at something, before a yellow blur launched towards him and covered his whole head in a smothering hug.

"KYOTARO!!!!" Karls shouted. "YOU'RE HERE!" He giggled and would have clapped his hands together, were he not still plastered to Kyotaro's face.

"Yes," Kyotaro agreed. He peeled the otter off his face and settled him carefully around his shoulders instead, "It's not too late for me to make that otter-pelt scarf, you know."

Karls shuddered and dug his front paws into Kyotaro's upper arm. "I'm the king now, all of Honyala Land would come after you if you did that."

"No," Ata interjected, "They'd just have a party for your funeral, like you want, and then Furanui would take over. It would be just fine."

Ryoma suddenly put his hand up over his face, probably to cover his laughter before Karls could get more offended.

Kyotaro sidled up behind his two friends, leaning all his weight forward onto their shoulders, and looking down at the cookbook they were staring at. "So what's this for?"

Ryoma bumped him backwards affectionately, but not enough to dislodge him. "I'm not

showing up empty handed, and you two are going to help me make something. Easy-peasy."

"So what are we making?" Kyotaro asked.

Ata flipped between two pages, talking about the dishes they were thinking of preparing as Ryoma nodded along. "The problem," Ata concluded, "is that we don't know what will complement their plans better."

"Why don't we just do both?"

Ryoma turned his head towards Kyotaro and exclaimed in mock-surprise, "Do I hear you choosing the option that's more work?"

Kyotaro shrugged and leaned even further onto his friends. "Deciding is too hard, and it's a big group anyway."

Karls clapped in delight. "He's right, he's right! Making both will make everyone happy!"

"Alright then," Ryoma said, "Let's get to work."

10:00 a.m.

Ryuu turned the corner towards the Gero family home. Usually he avoided such painful punctuality, but if he had timed this right, he should be arriving close to the same time as Io. They didn't see each other nearly often enough these days, so Ryuu wasn't going to waste any time. His pace quickened when he saw the figure standing on the front porch, evidently about to knock. "Io!" Ryuu called, breaking into a run.

Io turned around, a grin breaking out on his face as he watched Ryuu sprinting towards him. Ryuu saw the door open behind him, and Akoya leaned artfully on the doorframe, an amused quirk to his lips.

Ryuu slowed down just enough to not knock his two friends over and grabbed both of them in a hug, quick but fierce, before he rocked back onto his heels and put his hands on his hips. "Alright, Akoya, let's go solve your crisis."

Akoya led their way into his massive bedroom. A massive walk-in closet as well as a standing wardrobe were thrown open, in various states of disarray. On a side table, a charming array of light snacks was laid out next to a teapot placed over a tealight to keep it warm.

Ryuu rolled his eyes just slightly as Akoya draped himself dramatically over his chaise. "I simply have nothing to wear!"

Io patted the top of Akoya's head, somewhat awkwardly. "That's categorically untrue." He tilted his head significantly towards the many outfits they could see.

"So," Ryuu clapped his hands together, "What kind of impression are you hoping to make tonight? We'll figure that out, and the rest will follow after."

Akoya peeked out from the arm he had draped over his face. "I want to wear something that everyone will love."

A strange buzzing sound filled the air, and a light split the room above one of Akoya's ridiculously plush rugs. "Did someone say, LOVE?" an excited voice asked as a pink wombat alien tumbled into the room.

"Wom-san!" Ryuu laughed, "What are you doing here?"

"Well," Wombat shrugged, "I wasn't going to miss tonight. I did mean to end up with Yumoto-chan, though, there must be a problem with my alien teleportation technology. Ah

well." He wiggled back and forth, bashful and excited all at once.

Akoya sniffed. "I don't suppose you know anything about beauty, do you Wombat?"

"No, but I know everything about love," he said smugly, then dove towards Akoya's wardrobe. "So, let's see what's in here!"

Akoya's shriek of fury trailed off as Io scooped Wombat up just before he could get his paws on any of Akoya's clothes. "Wombat, you will just have to tell us what you think. Akoya and Ryuu will handle the clothes, and you and I will sit here, next to the snacks." He settled them both into a deep purple armchair while Wombat grumbled his agreement.

"Something everyone will love," Ryuu mused, as he began to flip through the myriad shirts and kimono in Akoya's closet. "We'd better find something that feels like you, then."

"Nothing does, today," Akoya groaned. "That's why you're here in the first place."

Io swallowed his sip of tea, then spoke in a soothing tone, "We'll work it out, Akoya."

Akoya grinned sharply, "Yes, well, let's hope so."

11:00 a.m.

Ichiro rocked back and forth on the barstool, enjoying the way it swivelled side-to-side. His mother would probably lecture his bad manners, but he was simply too excited to sit still! His favorite staff member set a glass of water down in front of him with an amused smile on her face. "What's going on today, Dougo-kun?"

"I'm meeting my friends!" Ichiro almost shouted in his glee. "They'll be here soon!"

Her smile widened into her usual friendly grin and she gave him a thumbs-up as she turned back to her other customers. A few minutes went by while Ichiro watched the chefs prepare the food and listened to snatches of other patrons' conversations.

Finally, finally, the door opened and let his friends in! Ichiro sat up straight and waved enthusiastically as Taishi and Maasa walked in, with a tall dark-skinned man Ichiro didn't—no he did recognise him, that was Furanui! He looked so different with regular street clothes on and his hair pushed back in a headband that it threw Ichiro off entirely. He sprang off his barstool when they got closer. "So! Where do you all want to sit!"

"Hi Ichiro," Taishi replied, "It's good to see you. This is your spot, where do you recommend?"

Maasa nodded his agreement, and Ichiro snagged his water from the counter before showing his friends to his favourite corner booth. "We're lucky it's empty!" Maasa and Furanui slid into one side of the booth, with Taishi and Ichiro opposite them.

"Well," Furanui responded, his dry tone rumbling, "We are rather early for lunch."

"I wanted to make sure we'd have plenty of time!" Ichiro protested.

"And we will," Maasa agreed, "And we'll still have time to stop by my parents' place to pick up a few things before we head over there."

"What do we have to pick up?" Ichiro stared at Maasa, wide-eyed, waiting for an answer.

Maasa smiled mysteriously then ducked down behind the menu, "You'll see." Furanui leaned in to Maasa to read off his menu as well.

Taishi opened the menu on their side of the booth and glanced over it. "What do you recommend, Ichiro?"

"Everything! It's all so, so, so good!" Ichiro exclaimed. "I'm probably gonna get the tonkatsu, but you can't make a wrong choice here." He smiled so wide he could feel his cheeks and eyes scrunching up.

Taishi chuckled and looked back at the menu, taking a few minutes to decide.

The staff member came back with water for all of them, to Ichiro's exclamation of, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, Kinugawa-san!" She laughed easily before asking for their orders for lunch. The conversation flowed easily, between Ichiro and Maasa's enthusiasm and Taishi and Furanui's calmer energy. Although it had only been a year since they finished high school, to Ichiro those days seemed so far behind them. And yet, here they were, having lunch with Furanui—who himself was a reminder that the events of their first year weren't just all some weird and wild fever dream.

Everyone liked their food, to Ichiro's great delight. It would've been terrible to invite his friends to his favourite spot and have them not like it. He was the only one who had stayed in Binan after graduation, and this restaurant had only opened a few months before then, so Maasa and Taishi had never been there. Sure, they probably had fancier places near their university in Tokyo, but they had agreed to come here with Ichiro. If only they could visit longer than a few days!

Ichiro patted his own cheeks sharply, to jolt himself out of his train of thought. Maasa quirked an eyebrow at him, and Ichiro just shrugged and took a bite of his tonkatsu.

Explaining would be hard, and they didn't need to be sad right now.

Maasa picked up the conversation with a new idea. "Do you think it's going to be weird, to be all together like this again?"

Furanui spoke up, from where he was lounging in the corner of the booth. "Is it again? I didn't think this whole group had ever been together."

"Not as such," Taishi agreed. "But I don't think it will be weird. There will be enough people there that something interesting will always be happening, and anyway, we're all still friends, even if it's been a while. Our senpai haven't forgotten us since they finished high school, either."

"True," Maasa had to agree. "Does Ryoma message you both as often as he does me?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" Ichiro burst out. "It's like he thinks we'll forget to eat or ever wear a raincoat if he doesn't make sure we've thought of it!"

"I don't know how he has time to pass his own university courses while he's taking care of our whole friend group." Taishi said in an awed tone.

"What if he's not?" Furanui asked, "Who takes care of Ryoma?"

"Nanao," the other three chorused in unison.

"They're weird," Ichiro shrugged, "But it works."

Maasa laughed. "Weird is an understatement. I'm excited to see them, though, and Ata and Taiju."

"What are the odds," Taishi said, "That Kyoutarou falls asleep in the middle of dinner?"

"Karls won't let him," Furanui said solemnly. "He'll pull his hair out."

The table burst into laughter again, and Ichiro settled back in his seat, feeling smug. He knew inviting the other two for lunch before the big event was a good idea.

12:00 p.m.

The knock came softly, just a few minutes after noon, and Atsushi sighed when he heard it. He curled up farther into his husband's side on their couch, and Kinshiro responded by scratching lightly through his hair. "I don't want to move." Atsushi grumbled.

Kinshiro hummed in response and turned the page in his book. Atsushi pulled his phone out of his pocket to send a text message. Soon after, the door creaked open, and En shouldered his way inside, cradling something gently in his palms. "You'll never guess who I found on the porch," he said, walking over towards them.

A tiny green hedgehog sniffed the air daintily. "Hello, Kinshiro, Atsushi."

"Zundar," Kinshiro returned stiffly.

"Hello, Zundar," Atsushi answered a little more warmly. "And En, thank you for bringing him in with you. We have tea and sandwiches here for you, En, but we weren't expecting another guest. Give me a few moments, and I'll get you something, Zundar."

"Thank you," Zundar intoned gravely. Atsushi had always found that his voice was almost comically mismatched with his tiny, adorable body. Reluctantly, he pulled himself away from Kinshiro's side to go find a saucer for Zundar. Kinshiro squeezed his hand briefly

before he was out of reach, and Atsushi carried the smile from that gesture with him into their kitchen.

He could hear a murmur of conversation as En settled into his favourite place on the floor, tucked into the corner between the couch and the wall. They were over thirty now, but Atsushi didn't think En was ever going to give up on wedging himself into that tiny spot. Maybe if he and Kinshiro ever moved the couch, but how could they?

Atsushi grabbed a few of the Zundar-friendly snacks Kinshiro made sure to keep in their kitchen cupboard. Even though almost fifteen years had passed, his husband still couldn't bring himself to fully trust Zundar, but he was always a good host. And in a weird way, Kinshiro was grateful to him, because without CIDE 2, it's possible that he and Atsushi never would have reconciled. Atsushi knew all this, but he didn't take the whole situation as personally as Kinshiro did; he'd been in a much better position regarding it all, as far as aliens and superpowers went.

They didn't really talk about it that much these days, unless they were watching a new magical girl show. But today, with everything going on, of course it was top of mind.

Kinshiro and En were deep into a lively debate about the last few chapters of some manga they were both reading. Zundar was curled up on a cushion on their end table, and Atsushi set the treats and saucer down in front of him, then poured tea into the saucer for him.

En, he noticed as he settled back onto the couch, was already halfway through his first cup of tea, although the sandwiches Kinshiro had made still appeared untouched.

"Atsu, you're back!" En cheered, "Now let's eat!" He handed Kinshiro and Atsushi each a sandwich, then took one for himself. They all placed their hands together and said, "Itadakimasu!"

En bit into the sandwich, then his expression turned thoughtful. Kinshiro and Atsushi exchanged a knowing glance, and sure enough, En started to pontificate on the merits of different sandwich toppings. Some things, it seemed, would never change.

1:00 p.m.

Ibushi was just unpacking his bento for lunch when two boisterous voices could be heard entering the break room. He glanced over his shoulder and sure enough—"Wakura-san, Unazuki-san, you seem to be in unusually high spirits today."

Wakura slid into the seat across from him, leaning his cheek on his palm coquettishly. "Well, you see, Arima-senpai, Taiju and I have plans after work today."

Unazuki had picked both their bentos up from the fridge and was just now taking his seat, handing one of the lunches to his friend. "It's true," he agreed, "Very... exciting plans, Arima-senpai."

"I wish you two would just call me Arima-san," Ibushi sighed, not for the first time. Ever since his younger coworkers had realized they were from the same hometown and had attended the same high school a decade apart, they insisted on acting like they were schoolmates. "Dare I ask what these plans are, or will I be scarred for life?" Ibushi teased back.

"Nothing of the sort," Wakura answered

cheerily as he offered some of his taiyaki to the others. Ibushi reached for it carefully, half expecting Wakura to snatch the cookie he was offering back. This time, he didn't.

"We're going back to Binan and meeting up with some friends. It'll be a bit of a long train ride, but we're excited about it." Unazuki answered.

"Well," Ibushi said, then paused. He took a bite of his onigiri and chewed contemplatively.

"Well, what?" Unazuki asked.

"Well," Ibushi smiled to himself. For all that they acted like international men of mystery, these two were so curious, and it was so easy to bait them. "I happen to be heading back to Binan myself, tonight. You're welcome to ride along with me, and I can drop you off."

Wakura clapped his hands in delight, "Arima-senpai, would you really? It would be so nice to get there on time!"

"I don't really mind it either way," Ibushi replied. "I'm sure it will be a lively drive with you two along."

Unazuki regarded him perhaps more seriously than the moment required. "We really appreciate it, Arima-senpai. We'll endeavour not to bore you."

"There's a catch," Ibushi said.

Wakura sighed, "Of course there is."

"We're leaving right from the office, no stops on the way. I also don't want to be late to my engagement this evening."

Wakura brightened immediately and Unazuki shrugged mildly as he said, "That's perfect. We were planning on it anyway, for the train."

"When are you two coming back up here?" Ibushi asked.

"We'll be staying all weekend and coming back Monday morning." Wakura replied promptly.

"You're on your own for the return, then, I'm staying until the next Sunday."

"Ah, that's fine," Unazuki said. "I hope you'll enjoy your stay, then. It's always nice to be home."

"I couldn't agree more. Have either of you visited recently?"

Wakura laughed, "We should be asking you that! All told, you've been away from there much longer than we have!"

"Hmm," Ibushi thought about it, "I think it was New Year's a few years ago. But my parents have visited me here, and so have some of my friends, so it doesn't feel that long. I miss the onsen, though."

"The Kurotama?" Unazuki sparkled. "That was our regular spot when we were in high school."

"The best onsen in Binan," Wakura intoned solemnly. "And such handsome staff."

Tiny, adorable Yumoto Hakone flashed before Ibushi's mind's-eye, and then he had to remind himself that Yumoto was around eight years older than his younger coworkers. He probably had seemed quite handsome to them when they were sixteen or so.

"I didn't start going that often until my third year," Ibushi admitted. "My social circle expanded rather dramatically that year, and our new friends loved that place. It is the best onsen in Binan, you're right, Wakura."

Wakura sighed dreamily, "We're going to spend so much time there this weekend."

Unazuki laughed, "That is, if the kids aren't running us ragged. They probably have all sorts of plans after tonight."

"Ah, those kids. I do miss them," Wakura smiled fondly.

"The kids?" Ibushi asked.

"Oh, we were the senpai to a rowdy bunch our third year, and that's who we're meeting up with," Wakura answered. "Taiju here was wrangling the student council and I was watching over our very own Earth Defense Club."

Ibushi blinked. Surely not—but then, according to the invitation he had received, and what everyone else had said—

1:15 p.m.

Nanao watched his coworker curiously. Arima looked like someone had struck him over the head. If he were an anime character, he would probably have frozen in place while his friend group kept walking or something. "The... earth defense club?" He managed to ask.

"Yes," Taiju laughed. "It was mostly an excuse for them to waste their time and avoid actually joining an after-school club."

"Until third year," Nanao said, reaching over to steal some onigiri from Taiju's plate, "when we really did defend the earth."

"Oh, shit," Arima breathed out in English, the curse word catching Nanao and Taiju both off guard. "I think we may be going to the same event tonight."

"At the Kurotama?" Taiju answered, and Arima

nodded. "But that would mean that you—" Arima nodded again.

"Were you in the Earth Defence Club too, senpai?" Nanao couldn't believe they had never talked about this!

"No," Arima answered, and he looked a little embarrassed. "I was in the Student council, and we were also... the Conquest Club."

Taiju and Nanao both laughed at that, and Taiju said, "And here I thought that Furanui trying to rule with fear and calling us magic knights Edelstein was dramatic."

"The Conquest Club?" Nanao wheezed through his laughter, "Were you really, Arima-senpai?"

"Yes, we were going to take over the Earth," Arima had a peculiar look on his face, as if he knew he was saying something that could be embarrassing, but he couldn't be bothered to be embarrassed by it anymore. "And we were all named like Sailor Moon knockoff characters. I was Argent, and I fought with Perlite and Aurite, against our Earth defense club. Their leader was their kouhai, and his family owns the Kurotama."

Nanao had a sudden recollection of how many odd things had happened in and around the Kurotama when they were in high school, and how remarkably relaxed the Hakone brothers had seemed about all of it. "Huh."

Next to him, he could feel Taiju shrug. "No wonder they were never surprised by anything."

Arima suddenly straightened up and pointed back at Nanao, "Hang on, you were the senpai in the Defense Club?"

"Yes," Nanao said.

"So you know Shuzenji Kyotaro?" Arima

pressed on. Nanao nodded, and Arima exclaimed, "That's my nephew!"

Taiju almost spit out his milk tea. "And it took you this long to realise you'd both fought with aliens?"

"Well," Arima shrugged, "We don't always see each other that often. I used to tell him stories about it, when he was little, but he thought I was making them up, and then I moved away when he was like, nine, you know?"

Nanao suddenly remembered the day Ichiro and Taishi had burst into the club room, arguing about whether or not there had been an Earth Defense Club before them, and Kyotaro had spun a fanciful story for them about their predecessors, before claiming to have made it all up.

The break room door swung open, and a few of their other coworkers spilled in, chattering brightly about their weekend plans. Arima glanced up at the clock and his mostly uneaten lunch. "We'll have to continue this on the car ride down tonight," he said. "I need to eat, and then it's back to work."

"Anything you say," Nanao paused, and decided to tease Arima even more than he usually did. "Argent-senpai!"

Arima inhaled sharply on a bite of rice and coughed a few times. Taiju shook with laughter next to him, and Nanao felt a wide grin on his own face as he tucked into his own meal. Tonight was going to be even more interesting than he had anticipated.

2:00 p.m.

En considered his next move while Kinshiro surveyed the shogi board. At the moment, his

positioning was better, but he had been surprised by En's skill in the past and was not looking to repeat that. Atsushi was excitedly telling them both about a movie he wanted to go see in the near future, and Kinshiro needed to remember to look up showtimes and tickets.

En moved his piece, and Kinshiro noted with glee that he was playing right into his plans. He was going to press his advantage all the way to victory. His phone chimed with a very specific tone. "At-chan, can you check that? It's Akoya or Ibushi," Kinshiro asked, while he double-checked for hidden failings in his strategy before he moved.

Atsushi paused in his retelling to pick up Kinshiro's phone. "Ah," he said.

"Who is it?" En asked. He pushed his hair back from his forehead with one hand, and it almost immediately fell back onto his face.

"Kinshiro has just received a rather cryptic text from Ibushi, that's all," Atsushi said. "Have a look," he said, and Kinshiro turned to accept his phone from his husband.

The text from Ibushi had been sent in their student council group chat that somehow, even all these years later, none of them could settle on renaming. The previous message was Akoya's flurry of emojis about his outfit and his hair, and now, a few hours later, here was Ibushi simply saying, "Tonight will be surprising".

Kinshiro sighed, "Is that cryptic? Tonight will almost certainly be surprising; I'm already surprised that we managed to coordinate this many people for one gathering."

En finally took his next turn, then answered,

"I think Yumoto might actually be magic. The Loveracelet didn't do anything; it's all him."

Atsushi laughed, "No, it's got to be the spirit of Binan or something, allowing us all to make it back. Maybe it's the Kurotama that's magic."

"Maybe," Kinshiro responded drily as he moved his token, "It's simply the practicality of planning something six months in advance."

Atsushi brushed Kinshiro's hair back from his face, smiling at him like he was the best sight in the world. "That's probably true, but still."

Kinshiro leaned slightly into the touch, "It does feel like magic, I'll agree there."

"You know what else is magic," En said. "This!" He excitedly moved a shogi piece.

Kinshiro looked at the board and tried to control his grin. En had just moved them into the endgame, and there was no way he was going to get out of this.

Atsushi must have noticed his expression though, because he said, "Oh, En, I think you've made a mistake."

En glanced back and forth between the two of them, and Kinshiro stopped trying to smother his confident smile. En cursed, a contrast to his usual laidback attitude.

"So," Kinshiro said, "This should be exciting." He moved another piece and went on speaking, "But still... I wonder what Ibushi was hinting at."

"I hope we'll have enough sake to cope with whatever it is," En said. "I'll need it after this game."

Atsushi glanced towards where their neatly packaged gift was sitting on the small table

by the door. "Between what the Hakones are sure to have and what we're bringing tonight, I think we'll be just fine. And the Beppus will definitely bring something too."

En brightened at that. "I hope it's another alien drink!"

"Their last interstellar tour ended a while ago," Kinshiro mused, "But it's possible they've been holding on to something. I suppose we'll see."

"That we will," Atsushi murmured, leaning back into Kinshiro's side.

"I can't wait," En declared.

3:00 p.m.

Maasa was fairly certain his parents wouldn't be home, but he hoped even harder. He would never hear the end of it for showing up with guests unannounced, never mind that he had told them days ago it was likely he'd have a few people over on Friday afternoon. And his mother would be delighted to pinch Ichiro's cheeks like he was a toddler and Ichiro would get annoyed by it... His father would ask Taishi and Furanui severe questions about their studies... It would simply be cuter if his parents weren't home. They had all had such a nice time at lunch, catching up and talking about everything and nothing, and it would be such a shame to spoil it now.

When they arrived at his house and it was evident that it was empty, Maasa breathed a sigh of relief. Furanui noticed and shot him a questioning glance, but Maasa ignored it to open the door. "Welcome inside, everyone!" He gestured back into the home.

Ichiro and Taishi followed Furanui in, and

everyone traded their shoes for house slippers. "Wow, wow, wow!" Ichiro gasped. "It's different since the last time I was here! That painting is new!" He exclaimed, and then darted across the front room to go have a closer look at the painting. Taishi followed at a more measured pace, stopping a half step behind Ichiro to look at the painting as well. They'd both grown in the last few years, and now Taishi was several centimetres taller than Ichiro, who was in turn several centimetres taller than Maasa. To his great delight, he had stayed short and tiny and cute. In fact, Taishi was around the same height as Furanui, which still took some getting used to.

"Didn't you have something we needed to do here?" Furanui asked. He had stayed in the entryway with Maasa while he was distracted watching his friends.

"Ah, yes," Maasa said, then called a little louder, "Taishi, Ichiro, come this way. I need your help!" He led the way back into their spare bedroom that had been Maasa's project room when he lived here, and which he had commandeered again for the weekend. "I thought it would be cute to make party favors for everyone! I need to finish them up this afternoon, and you all get to help me now!"

Furanui settled onto the floor comfortably, and Taishi and Ichiro followed suit as Maasa began pulling out cute bags and ribbons and groups of various small items. "But Maasa," Furanui said, "Among you Earthlings, doesn't the host usually do this sort of thing?"

"Well, yes," Maasa admitted, "But I knew they were going to be doing so much already, and I thought it would be fun to do this!"

"And this way," Taishi said, turning over a

small packet of cookies, "They'll be cuter, right, Maasa?"

"Duh, duh, duh!" Ichiro agreed. "Everything Maasa does is the cutest ever!"

"And anyway," Maasa went on, "They were happy to let me do this when I asked. Look, they even helped me come up with a list of colors so I could personalize each gift for everyone! So, let's get to work!"

The rest of the afternoon passed quickly, as they talked and laughed and assembled an array of small gift bags in beautiful wrapping. It was much easier than managing this all by himself, Maasa had to admit, even if his friends didn't always do things exactly the way he would have done them.

4:00 p.m.

After Akoya had settled on his outfit—which everyone was certain to love—and made sure that he wasn't going to clash with Io or Ryuu, he was ready for the next phase of party preparation. That is: hair and makeup!

Ryuu had been agreeable right away, but it had taken some doing to convince Io and Wombat to agree to their spa afternoon. Still, everyone had enjoyed the massage and facial treatments, and now they were close to getting their manicures finished. With all the time in the world, Akoya would have loved to do this for each of them, but it simply wasn't manageable. Beauty couldn't be rushed and they were on such a tight time frame. After all, they still had to style their hair and do their makeup and make sure they could arrive at the party—well, not completely punctually, Akoya didn't want to be the very first people there—at a decent time.

So, instead, he relaxed in the salon chairs with his friends as they sat through and mani-pedi session, and their nails were trimmed, buffed, and colored. Lucky for them, this salon also did pet-pedicures, so they were well-equipped to deal with their alien friend. Wombat had been overwhelmed by the options and overjoyed by the idea of it, and finally selected a bright electric blue to be painted on his little nails. Io had opted for a golden sheen, where Ryuu, surprisingly, chose to keep his nails natural looking, simply polished and treated with a clear coat for durability. Akoya chatted cheerfully with his friends and the salon employees, delight settling deep in his chest as a gorgeous lavender shade was put on his own nails. This would look simply beautiful with his outfit.

Akoya's phone pinged with a particular sound, and he carefully pulled it from his bag with the hand that wasn't yet painted. He had notifications in their old student council group chat. From Ibushi, a few hours ago, a message that simply said, "Tonight will be surprising" and then from Kinshiro, just now, "En and Atsushi think you're being cryptic." Akoya laughed, picturing easily how En would have badgered Kinshiro into sending the message. He typed back cheerfully, "I'll be the grandest surprise of them all!" with a string of sparkling diamond emojis. Then he had to tuck his phone back into his bag, as it was time to paint his second hand.

After a short trip back to Akoya's home, they all settled in to perfect their hair and makeup. Ryuu and Akoya debated back and forth about braids and hairpieces, while Io simply took a seat at the mirror to carefully apply his concealer and highlighter. He kept a very minimal makeup approach, but Akoya noticed him

smiling every time he caught a glimpse of his golden nails. Finally, he settled for a half-up braided crown with some soft pearls woven through and the rest down and lightly curled. Ryuu opted to leave his hair, almost as long now as Akoya's, all the way down, but worked a treatment through it that gave his hair a beautiful jewel-like sheen. Akoya even let Wombat borrow a blue butterfly hair clip to pin next to his hair, after he asked very politely and promised to take good care of it.

Akoya couldn't remember the last time he'd had such a carefree afternoon. Usually, he had so many things to take care of, always another task, but today, his only job was spending time with his friends, and making himself beautiful—two of his favourite things in the world. He couldn't wait for that evening.

"Ah, Akoya," Ryuu said from the mirror, where he was carefully lining his eyes. "Do you suppose we could drop by mine on our way over there tonight? I've got a little something to bring along, and I didn't think to bring it with me this morning when I came over."

"I brought mine," Io said, smugly. Ryuu rolled his eyes and Akoya hid a laugh behind his blush brush.

"What are you all bringing anyway?" Akoya asked.

Ryuu lit up, "I've got these fun hair clips for Yumoto and a nice headband for Gora-san. I wanted to get them something they could use after the party too."

Io nodded along, "That's how I thought as well. I've got Gora a new tennen toishi for his axe, and Yumoto the newest few volumes of that manga he loves."

Akoya tilted his head, considering whether to do something different with his eyeshadow. "Did Gora-san not already have a sharpening stone?"

"Yumoto said he only had them for the kitchen knives," Io said, "and definitely not one specifically for his axe. I thought it might be nice to get him one for that specifically. And it's—"

"The best that money can buy!" Akoya and Ryu finished in unison with Io, who looked a little put out at having his phrase echoed.

"How thoughtful of both of you," Akoya said. "I'm afraid I just went the party route. I've got a few bottles of champagne I picked up in France last month and a charcuterie platter."

Ryu jolted, almost smearing his mascara. "I don't suppose we could get an early look at the charcuterie?"

Akoya snorted ungracefully, "Absolutely not. I'll punch you if you try to peek."

Ryu pouted theatrically and Io just laughed.

"Wait a minute," Wombat finally broke in. "Was I supposed to bring a gift to this? For as long as I've been around, and I still don't know all the Earth customs!"

All three burst into laughter then, before trying to assure Wombat that it would be fine if he didn't have anything, that it wasn't mandatory, just nice. He looked unconvinced, glaring with his arms crossed. The butterfly clip and the bright blue nails made it harder than usual for Akoya to take him seriously at all. If this afternoon was any preview, this evening was going to be simply delightful.

5:00 p.m.

Ryoma had directed them around the kitchen all afternoon, managing Kyotaro's low-energy efforts and Ata's perfectionism with such ease. It had been over three years since they reconciled, and yet Ata was still surprised, sometimes, by how easy it could be to be with these two. Somehow, their friendship was still just as simple as when they were children. Now, they were carefully packing up the green tea cookies and the red bean cake in preparation for leaving.

It had been an ordeal, preventing Karls from sampling any of them early, and now the little yellow otter was sulking underneath the couch.

Ryoma showed them to the restroom and the guest room so they could freshen up, then excused himself to his own bedroom to change out of his cooking attire. Ata washed his hands and made sure he wasn't covered in flour or crumbs, and then sat down on Ryoma's couch.

Kyotaro followed soon after him, and leaned over onto Ata's shoulder, sighing deeply. "I think I'm ready for a nap now, Ata-chan."

"You can't nap now," Ata replied. All Kyotaro ever thought about was sleeping. "It's dinnertime, and besides, we have to leave soon."

"It's enough time for me to close my eyes," Kyotaro eventually replied, then settled further into Ata's side. Ata sat carefully, not wanting to dislodge him, but also feeling like every place they touched was buzzing with electricity. Kyotaro really was the worst, sometimes.

It could have been a few minutes, or it could have been an hour, when Ryoma finally emerged from his room, ready to go out for the

evening. "Alright," he said, "Let's get going then. We'll be just on time if we leave now!"

"Ryoma," Ata said helplessly, "He's asleep."

Ryoma leaned over the back of the couch and shoved Kyotaro forward and off of Ata's shoulder. "Get up, Kyotaro, it's time for us to leave!"

Kyotaro crumpled in half, then stood up and stretched grandly. "If we must. I'll carry the cookies."

Ata picked up the red bean cakes, and Ryoma reached under the couch to pull out Karls. He scratched him on top of his head, then settled him across his shoulders. Ryoma locked the door behind them and they set out across town.

It was a gorgeous summer evening, with a cool breeze washing over the town while cicadas hummed in the trees. All sorts of people were out in the streets, young and old, friends and lovers and families. Ata smiled when a group of teenaged boys crossed in front of them, loudly debating about what the best way to win the Pretty Boy Contest was. "I can't believe they're still doing that," he said.

"And give up on thousands of months of tradition?" Kyotaro responded. "That would be too hard to stop doing."

Ryoma laughed, "It's ridiculous, that's for sure, but it's such a staple of the Binan High experience. I don't expect it to ever go away."

"It's the best!" Karls piped up from Ryoma's shoulders. "I keep trying to start something like that in Honyala Land, but it just won't catch on..."

"Remember that time when," Ata began, and let himself get carried away by the retelling of the story as they continued across town. They kept trading stories, memories sparked by the different places in the town. It was nice, to be with Ryoma and Kyotaro like this.

Ata was a little nervous about going to such a big gathering tonight, where everyone would want to be friends, but he did already get on quite well with half of the people there... It was just the matter of meeting the other half. But then, they had something in common that most people didn't, and Ata was interested in speaking with the other student council president, from back then. They had such similar experiences, and it sounded like he had come out of them so well.

The walk wasn't that long, and soon enough, they turned down the street, and their destination was in sight. The Kurotama Onsen looked friendly as ever, with the addition of a large banner in beautiful calligraphy that said "Closed for private event" stretched above the door. "We made it!" Karls shouted. "Let's go!"

6:00 p.m.

Everything was ready to go, thanks in large part to the help of Akihiko, Haruhiko, and Dadacha! He and Gora-anchan could have managed it all, but it's always nicer to have friends. Hashibiro was fun to have around to talk to, even if he couldn't do too much; most of their chores weren't designed to be done by someone with wings. And with Dadacha and Gora together in the kitchen, the food was sure to be delicious! It already smelled so good, but Yumoto had been holding back from taking any early. It had been hard, when they were set-

ting it all up in the banquet room, but he really wanted to wait for all his friends!

It would be six o'clock soon, and that's what time the invitations said the party would start, so Yumoto had gathered everyone in the entryway to await the arrival of their first guests. Akihiko and Haruhiko were telling Gora a story from their last interstellar VEPPer tour, but Yumoto just stared at the door, willing their friends to arrive.

Just a few moments later, the first knock sounded. Yumoto bounded over to open the door, revealing Atsushi, En, and Kinshiro with Zundar sitting in his front shirt pocket. "You're the first ones here!" Yumoto said excitedly as he gestured them inside.

Atsushi grinned, "We figured it wouldn't hurt to show up a few minutes early."

A flurry of greetings was exchanged, and then Gora and Hashibiro walked their friends back to the banquet room.

Yumoto was back to anxiously waiting watching the seconds tick by on his phone. After what felt like forever, the next knock on the door came just after six. Yumoto rushed to open it, and saw a trio of young men that he recognized well, from all their time at the Kurotama. "Hello, welcome!" He exclaimed gleefully as they came inside.

Ata, Ryoma, and Kyotaro all thanked him, and Karls perked up and looked around cheerfully. "We brought desserts," Ata said. "Where can we put them?"

"Oh, thank you!" Yumoto cheered, "Aki and Haru will show you!" The Beppu brothers led their guests up into the banquet room, while Dadacha came to perch on Yumoto's shoulder while they awaited everyone else's arrival.

Yumoto stared out the window to wait and see who would arrive next when a car he didn't recognize drove by with Ibushi at the wheel. Sure enough, a few minutes later, after parking, Ibushi was the next to knock. Yumoto was surprised to see him with a few of the younger crowd. "Ibushi-senpai! I didn't know you knew Nanao-kun and Taiju-kun!" Yumoto exclaimed as they came inside.

"It's the funniest thing, Yumoto-san," Nanao answered. "We've been coworkers for months and only just today realized we have more in common than our hometown."

"And Argent-senpai was nice enough to give us a lift, once we knew we were all coming to the same place tonight after work," Taiju added.

"Wow, that's amazing!" Yumoto crowed, "I'm so happy! Dadacha can show you all to the banquet room where we're having the party." The green squirrel nodded enthusiastically and leaped from Yumoto's shoulder to glide down the hallway, with the three humans trailing behind.

The next group to arrive were the youngest of them all, and the stern alien prince. Yumoto cheerfully welcomed in the next generation of Defense Club kouhai, and pointed them down the hall towards the banquet room. "Just follow the sounds, you can't miss everyone!" Taishi and Furanui thanked him for hosting, while Ichiro was already darting down the hall, a hand wrapped around Maasa's wrist to tug his cousin along. Yumoto had the sudden thought that he probably looked just as silly to outsiders when he was that age, and couldn't help but smile.

Finally, fashionably late, but not so late that Yumoto got too bored waiting for them,

Akoya, Io, and Ryuu appeared at the door, with... "Wombat!" Yumoto shouted gleefully, scooping his furry friend up in a giant hug. "I'm so happy you're here too!"

Wombat leaned into the hug as Yumoto carried him down the hall, "Everyone is here now, you all were the last ones!"

As they stepped through the doorway into the banquet room, Yumoto was overwhelmed for a moment, and stopped, just hugging tight to Wombat.

Their space was just big enough for twenty people and a handful of magical alien companions, but it was cheerful and bursting with life. Music played softly in the background, and everyone was talking cheerfully, in a myriad of little groupings that Yumoto couldn't wait to work his way through. At a glance, he saw Haruhiko and Maasa comparing something on their phones, and Kinshiro already deep in conversation with Ata, while Kyotaro and Ibushi looked on fondly. Ryuu made a beeline for the food table, while Io went over to greet Gora, who was talking with Hashibiro. Nanao and Taiju were debating something with En and Atsushi, and Akihiko was surrounded by Dadacha, Furanui, Karls, and Zundar. Taishi, Ichiro, and Ryoma were all sitting together, but their conversation had trailed off and they appeared to be staring in awe at Akoya, who, after placing his charcuterie spread just so on the counter with the food, swept grandly in their direction.

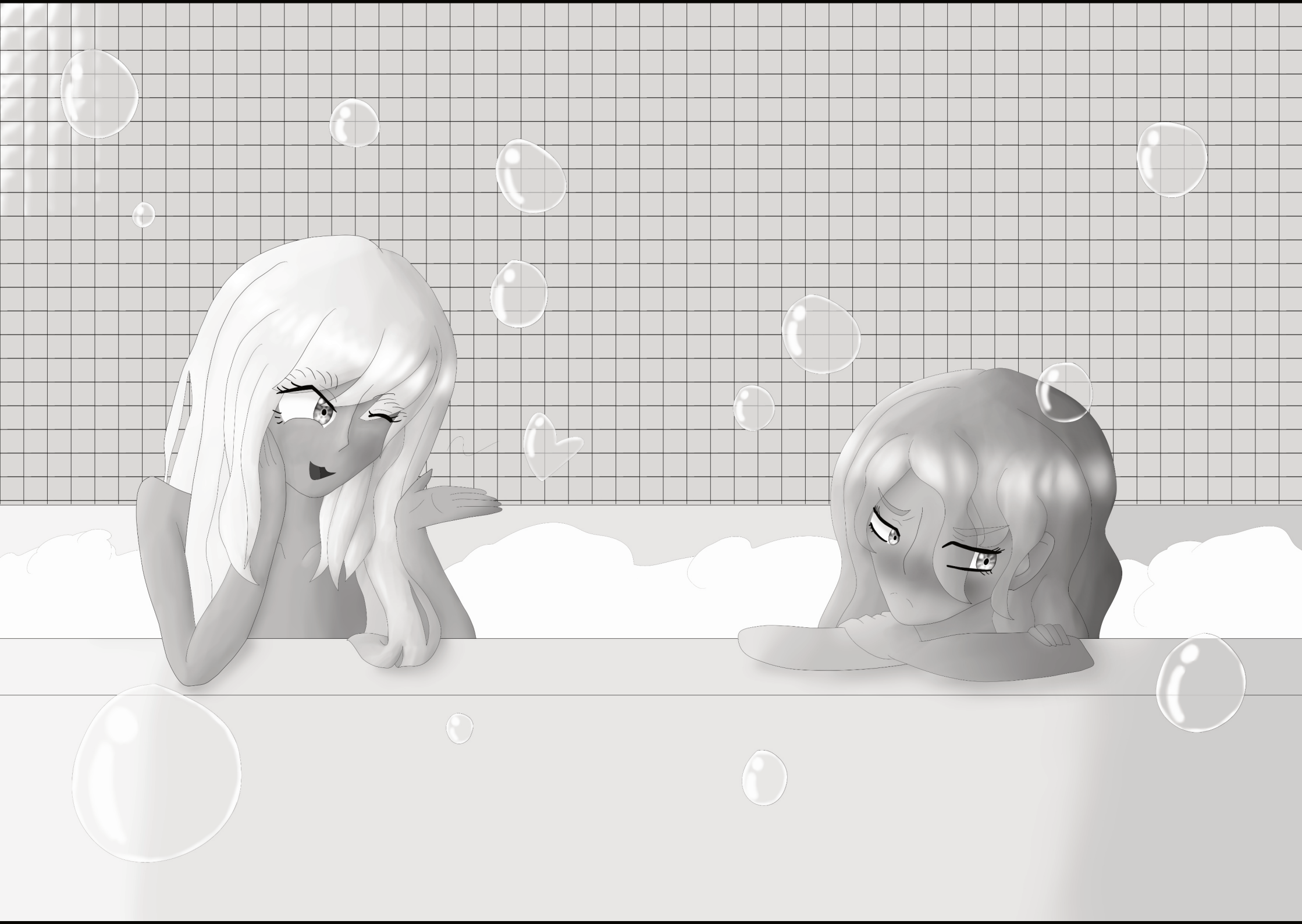
There was so much happening and Yumoto didn't want to miss a single second of it! He hugged Wombat tighter for a second, then set him down in favour of picking up his Polaroid camera. They would all want these pictures later, he was sure of it.

The rest of the night passed by in the most delightful blur of friends, food, and good times. At some point, they all ended up in the baths, and Yumoto was sure they had never been so crowded or so lively. And it was so fun to be in a group that could talk openly about aliens and superpowers and monsters and all the crazy things they had been involved with in high school.

"We should do this every year," Yumoto found himself exclaiming, when everyone was crowded back into the banquet room and enjoying the champagne Akoya had brought. There was a brief lull in the noise, and then everyone started chiming in their agreements. Amazing! Yumoto made everyone gather in close to him, and then, taking advantage of his height, stretched out to take a Polaroid selfie of the whole group. Both Maasa and Ryuu demanded that he take one on their phones as well, so they would easily have something to post later.

A few minutes later, Yumoto rushed over to Gora to show him how well the Polaroid selfie had turned out, and Gora slung his arm around his shoulders and tipped their heads together as they surveyed the party, all of their friends, old and new, together and enjoying themselves. "This was a good idea, Yumoto," Gora said.

"Thanks for helping me pull it off, Gora-an-chan!" Yumoto's smile felt big enough to split his face in half.





Time and Time Again

SilvorMoon

The axe swung cleanly through the monster, splitting it neatly in half.

A little too neatly. Normally, when Gora did this, the monster's outer shell would pop apart and the human who had been trapped inside their own painful feelings would burst free. This time, the monster only broke apart into a glowing mist and vanished. He leaned on his axe, breathing heavily.

But not for long. He had only been resting a second or two before something that looked like an angry bundle of rope came bearing down on him, shrieking its discontent to the world.

"Oh, no, not you again!" Gora complained to the world. "This is the third time!"

The monster didn't listen. He hadn't expected it to. Gora managed to dodge the first lashing rope, but he stumbled a little, so that the dodge turned into a roll. He managed to right himself and raise his axe just in time to block another blow.

"Don't know how much longer I can keep this up," he panted.

Automatically, he raised his eyes to the top of a nearby building, where yet another monster stood waiting. This one wasn't attacking him, though. It was just watching. It was, basically, an oversized version of one of those portable cassette players, with the two wheels of the tape making a pair of huge goo-

gly eyes. It didn't seem to be doing very much, and yet it was currently the source of all his problems and he wished he could get close enough to it to do something about it.

So far, what he knew about it was that this morning, the Cassette Deck Monster had been Mudano Jikan, a senior from Gora's school who was known for living in the past, constantly reflecting back on his failures and missed opportunities and thinking about how he might have done things differently if he'd had a chance. Lately the pressure of graduating, taking college entrance exams, and getting ready for adult life had pushed that tendency into overdrive, and so he had become a creature that could literally rewind time and do things over it didn't like how things had gone the first time.

Gora swung his axe, cutting the Gordian Knot monster in twain and sending it back to the time it had come from. He didn't even get a chance to breathe this time before two more monsters came to take its place.

"You may need to retreat," said Hashibiro from his safe perch in a nearby tree. "This approach is clearly getting us nowhere."

"That's easy for you to say," Gora grumbled.

Nevertheless, he managed to hack his way to an opening and make a run for it. He could hear the Cassette Deck Monster jeering at him as he fled.

"Any time you want a second chance at beating me, I'll be here!" it taunted.

Gora ignored it in favor of finding somewhere safe to hide, eventually taking shelter amid a clump of decorative bamboo. He sat on the ground, breathing hard, while he waited for his mentor to rejoin him. A few seconds later,

Hashibiro made his ponderous way through the stalks.

"Are you all right, Maximum Gorar?" he asked.

"I'm bushed, but I'm fine," said Gora. "It's just that there's no end to the guy. Every time I get him on the ropes, he rewinds time and pulls a monster out of the past to throw at me, and he's getting faster at throwing them at me than I am at getting rid of them."

He didn't say, *I don't know if I can do this on my own this time*, but he was thinking it. Up until now, it had always been a one-on-one fight, but with this many monsters in play and his strength running out...

"It sounds," said Hashibiro thoughtfully, "as though you could use some help."

"Is there help?" Gora asked. Easygoing man that he was, he was nevertheless going to be annoyed if it turned out he could have had help this whole time and Hashibiro has let him slug it out on his own.

"Not usually," said Hashibiro, "but in this case, maybe. This monster isn't just causing trouble in this specific time and place, it's disrupting the whole space-time continuum. That sort of thing can't be allowed to stand. It could destabilize the whole universe if it's allowed to go on long enough. In a case like that, I'm allowed to pull some strings."

"I'd be grateful for any help you can come up with," said Gora with feeling.

"In that case," said Hashibiro, "I'm going to take advantage of the disruption by reaching into the timeline and bringing in the nearest heroes to where we are now. They may be from the past, or from the future, or from

a nearby planet. Whoever they are, it's possible we can persuade them to help us."

"If they're heroes, then they'll definitely help," said Gora staunchly.

"Quite likely," said Hashibiro, "since I don't think I can send them back until the monster is defeated."

"That doesn't seem very..." Gora began, but Hashibiro cut him off.

"I'm sure it will be fine," he said. "Just do exactly as I say..."

★★★

Gora looked through the door to the men's baths.

"Hey, you fellas," he called out. "It's going to be closing time soon. Better wrap it up."

Atsushi was surprised. He'd been enjoying himself so much that it felt like hardly any time at all had passed.

"We'll be out in a minute," he promised.

There were various splashes and good natured complaints as everyone began clambering out of the tubs. It had been a good evening. Things had been lively around the Kurotama ever since the Student Council had come home and the Beppu twins had made their peace with the Earth Defense Club. Sometimes Atsushi had a feeling that his friend group alone was keeping the Kurotama afloat, as much time as they all spent there. Still, everyone was enjoying the arrangement and that was what mattered.

I wonder what will happen when we graduate,

he mused. *When all of us have grown up and moved on, will someone else take our places?*

"I don't see why I have to get out," Yumoto complained. "I don't have to go home. I live here."

"You might want to eat dinner," Haru suggested.

Slyly, Aki added, "Of course, if you don't, we'd be happy to finish your share..."

Yumoto gave a yelp and lunged for the edge of the tub, drawing protests from Akoya, who'd gotten splashed in the process. Atsushi smiled.

Somebody is always going to be here, I guess. Nothing is ever going to pry those three out of this place.

They all made their way to the changing area and began pulling their clothes back on. Atsushi listened to the talk going on around them: Io making plans to go somewhere with Akoya that weekend, Haru discussing taking the Hakones horseback riding one day, Ryuu and Aki debating movies, En discussing a book he'd been reading with Arima. Atsushi cast a quick look at Kinshiro and got a smile in response.

Things sure have changed since this school year started, Atsushi thought. I wonder what else is going to change?

He got his answer a moment later, when the world went blurry and everything began to disappear.

When Gora looked back into the room, he assumed that everyone had gone home.

★★★

Everyone was surprised when Kyotaro abruptly sat up and opened his eyes.

"He lives!" Taiju joked.

Ryouma looked at him with concern.

"What happened? Did you have a nightmare?"

"No," said Kyotaro, blinking sleepily. "I just had a feeling something was about to happen, and I didn't want to miss it."

"What could happen?" Ichiro asked. "We aren't going to get invaded by monsters again, are we?"

It was hard to tell from his tone whether he was excited or worried by the prospect.

Kyotaro rubbed the back of his head. "Darned if I know. I just have this funny feeling that something is coming."

Everyone waited patiently for a moment to see if anything was coming.

Gora poked his head around the door.

"Hey, guys, we're closing in a few," he said. "Time for you to wrap it up."

A few people giggled, and Kyotaro grinned sheepishly.

"Thank you, Mr. Hakone," said Ata gravely. "We'll be out in a minute."

"Well," said Nanao, when Gora had gone, "you can't say our Kyotaro wasn't accurate."

"All the same, I'm not impressed," said Taishi.

"I don't think that was it," said Kyotaro. "It felt more like..."

Just then, a brightly glowing circle opened in the air. It pulsed with brilliant multicolored lights for a moment. Then, with a particularly eye-burning flash, two objects dropped

out of it. One landed neatly on Maasa's head, while the other dropped into the water with a tremendous splash.

Karls popped his head above the water and gave himself a shake.

"Whee, that was fun!" he exclaimed.

"Control yourself, Brother," said Furanui from his lofty perch. "Remember that you are a king now."

"Aw, but we're on vacation!" Karls protested.

Kyotaro smiled.

"See?" he said. "I told you."

Ichiro pushed Taishi out of the way for a better look. "Hey, hey, hey, you came back! Did you come back to visit us?"

"Yep!" said Karls happily.

"No," said Furanui.

"Nothing is wrong, I hope," said Ata.

Furanui groomed an ear thoughtfully. "As to that, I could not say. The truth is, our soothsayers read the signs and determined that it was very important that we should pay a call on you on this day."

"So we got Kamopapa and Uncle Wao to look after the kingdom for us for a few days and here we are!" said Karls happily.

"Cool!" said Ichiro happily. "We should do something to celebrate! I mean, it's not every day friends from another world come to visit, right?"

"We could all go to Maasa's house," said Maasa. "Maasa could make cupcakes."

"I believe we are here for a serious reason," said Furanui. He licked his whiskers

thoughtfully. "However, as we do not know yet what that reason is, a visit would be an agreeable way to pass the time."

There was a general agreement that as ways of killing time went, cupcakes were a pretty good one. They all clambered out of the baths and started pulling on their clothes. They were still in the middle of a complicated debate on which of several flavors of cupcakes Maasa suggested would be the best (Karls had some extremely odd ideas about what could go in a cupcake) when the world started going blurry around the edges.

A few minutes later, Gora looked into the changing room and found it empty.

"Huh," he said thoughtfully, and walked away.

★★★

Atsushi shook himself and looked around. His first thought was that he had overheated a bit in the bath and gotten a bit faint. That couldn't be right, though. It had been getting dark a minute ago, and now it was full daylight, probably late afternoon. He was also pretty sure he couldn't have walked from the bathhouse to wherever he was now without noticing, no matter how out of it he was. For that matter, he thought it unlikely that if he had, he would have bought all his friends with him.

"What just happened?"

Wombat sniffed the air warily. "Someone just did something to us."

"Where are we now?" Yumoto asked. "This looks sort of familiar, but I don't..."

"I know where this place is," said Kinshiro quietly. "Do you remember, Atchan? We used to spend our pocket money at that shop there."

Atsushi looked, and he did see. Just a short distance ahead was a small sweet shop. He and Kinshiro would go there some days and buy bags of sweets, and then go off somewhere to share the haul. He had loved that shop.

It had closed three years ago when the confectioner retired.

"That can't be right," said Atsushi. All the same, his hand went automatically to his pocket to look for spare change.

"I remember this place now," said Arima. "My mother used to buy her hats at that dress shop over there."

"So we're back in time," said En, with the poise of a man who could accept just about anything as long as he wasn't expected to do something about it. "I hope this doesn't mean I have to go to high school again. I thought I was almost finished with that."

Kinshiro looked sternly at Wombat.

"Why have we gone back in time?" he demanded.

Wombat looked cross. "I don't know! I told you, someone brought us here."

"Who?" Kinshiro persisted.

"If I knew that I'd tell you!"

Yumoto was looking at something in the opposite direction as everyone else. Since he seldom did what everyone else was doing, no one had paid much attention to this, but now they looked as he pointed.

"Maybe it was them?" he suggested.

★★★

On the whole, Kyotaro took being whisked away by some inexplicable force fairly well. It wasn't exactly the first time it had happened.

"Okay, this isn't the best," he opined.

"I should think not," said Taishi. "I don't approve of being yanked around like that."

"No," said Kyotaro. "I mean, if you're going to go to all the bother of magically whisking someone away somewhere, you should at least send them somewhere interesting enough to be worth the bother. This is just a normal town."

Everyone looked around. It was indeed not so different from the place they had left.

"I don't know," said Taishi, frowning. "I can't put my finger on it, but there's something..."

Taiju's attention seemed to be caught by something in one of the shop windows.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I think you should take a look at this."

They all clustered around. There was a long period of thoughtful silence. Then Ichiro said, very quietly, "Oh!"

They were looking at an advertisement. As an ad went, it was not very interesting, merely announcing that a sale on soft drinks would be taking place over the weekend. It was the date, however, that had caught Taiju's eye.

"I don't get it," said Karls. "What are we looking at?"

"We're in the wrong time," said Taiju. "If this poster is to be believed, we've gone backwards by about twenty years."

"That's too much!" Ichiro complained. "I'm not even supposed to be alive twenty years ago!"

Furanui's tail twitched. "Clearly this is why my brother and I were sent to you. Something very strange is going on, and you will need our help to deal with it."

"Can you get us back where we belong?" Ryouma asked anxiously.

Karls and Furanui consulted on this point, and the answer seemed to be: maybe. First, though, they would have to figure out why they were there and who had brought them in the first place. Once they knew how it had been done, the ought to be able to undo it.

"So how do we figure that out?" Taishi demanded. "I mean, it could have been anybody!"

Karls pointed up the street and suggested, "Maybe it was them?"

And it was at that moment that they realized they were being watched.

★★★

And now the two groups were standing together, confusing each other.

"Okay, okay, let me get this straight," said En. "You guys are from our future, but we're all in the past. Have I got that right?"

"It does seem that way," Taiju admitted cheerfully.

"So why are we all here?" asked Ryuu. "That's what I want to know."

Kyotaro shrugged. "General weirdness, I expect. It happens once in a while. Best thing

to do is just wait and see if it will sort itself out on its own."

"As appealing as it would be to start playing the stock market with advance knowledge of what the next ten years will be," said Io dryly, "I don't think that's actually an option. I don't know about you, but I'd like to go home."

Aki and Haru had tuned out the conversation. They seemed to be deep in their own discussion, one that consisted only partly of words and partly of gestures and meaningful glances impenetrable to anyone who wasn't the two of them.

At length, Aki said, "Does anyone here know the exact date?"

"I'll find out!" said Ichiro, and raced off towards the nearest convenience store.

He came bounding back a few seconds later and relayed his findings. The twins looked at each other with a strange light in their eyes. Atsushi, the quickest on the uptake, saw this and said, "Oh!"

"You know something?" asked Ata.

"If this is really Binan ten years ago from where we started," said Atsushi, "then Maximum Gorar is probably around here somewhere. I'll bet he has something to do with all this."

Ata's look of suspicion deepened. "And who or what is a Maximum Gorar?"

"Only the most amazing person ever!" said Haru, and was immediately shushed by some of his friends.

"Sorry about him," said Atsushi. "The Beppu brothers are fans of his. Maximum Gorar is the hero who protected Earth around this time."

Ichiro was fascinated. "So there were superheroes in Binan before us?"

This remark naturally required some explaining, and it was several minutes before everyone understood each other well enough to proceed.

"So let's review," said Kinshiro, taking on the role of boardroom chairman as usual, "is that you all are the defenders of Binan High as well, only from about ten years in our future?"

"That's correct," said Ata. "And what you're telling us is that you lot all do the transforming hero bit the same way we do?"

"That seems to be the case," Kinshiro agreed.

Ichiro prodded Taishi. "See? See? I told you there was an Earth Defense Club before us, and you didn't listen!"

Taishi pushed his glasses up his nose and scowled. "They haven't actually said they are the Earth Defense Club, though."

"We are, though," said Ryuu. "I mean, we were that before we even started doing the superhero thing. But the sign was there even before we were. I don't think anyone really knows how it got started."

"Maybe we can go back in time and find out," Ichiro suggested. "I mean, as long as we're jumping around..."

Nobody seemed to find this idea particularly pleasing, and the general consensus seemed to be that no, the idea here was to stop messing around with the timestream and get everyone back to where they had came from.

They were still caught up in this discussion when a large blue bird dropped into the midst

of them. Everyone reeled away in alarm, all except Yumoto, who had made friends with Karls and was now off in his own happy little world, sitting on the sidewalk and nuzzling the otter's fluffy pelt.

"There you are," the bird said. "I expected you to land closer to us. I've been looking all over for you."

"Well, it's not like you sent an engraved invitation or anything," En drawled.

The bird ignored him.

"My apologies if this is confusing for you," he said. "My name is Hashibiro, and..."

"Yeah, I know," said Yumoto, not looking up from what he was doing. "You're big brother's friend."

The bird took a couple of lurching steps closer to him, examining him first with one eye and then the other.

"Yumoto?" he said. "That's one I didn't expect."

Yumoto nodded eagerly. "And these over here are all my friends! Those guys over there aren't my friends yet, but they're heroes too and they're here to help!"

Taishi muttered, "I never said I'd..." and was summarily shushed.

Yumoto ignored him. "What's going on? Did something happen to Big Brother? Is he okay?" he asked.

Hashibiro said, "Maximum Gorar is fighting a difficult battle, and he needs help. I've summoned you all here to come to his aid."

Ata gave Hashibiro a dubious look. "And if we don't want to help, will you send us back?"

"The monster he is battling has disrupted

the stream of time," said Hashibiro. "That is what allowed me to bring you here in the first place, but I can't send you back until the timestream is restored. When the monster is defeated, all of you will be able to return to your proper times."

"Huh," said Kyotaro. "Well, that doesn't leave much room for argument, does it? Okay, let's do it. What's one monster?"

Various people groaned and exclaimed over this. They were drowned out by the Beppu twins, who had converged on Hashibiro abruptly enough to make him take a few stumbling, wing-flapping steps backwards.

"We're ready! Lead the way!" they said.

Hashibiro nodded. "Follow me, then."

He flapped into the air. The twins and Yumoto pelted after him, and the rest of their friends scrambled to catch up. The assorted knights of Honyaraland straggled along after them, either because they saw their ticket home escaping, or because Yumoto was still carrying Karls.

As they jogged along, Taishi said to Ichiro, "You know what?"

"What?" his friend replied.

"Next time Kyotaro starts having premonitions," said Taishi, "I am going to go somewhere else!"

★★★

Gora had taken shelter behind one of the school's outbuildings, and hated himself for it. He was supposed to be the hero; it was his job to fight monsters whenever they appeared

and protect his city from harm. The problem was that every time he showed his face, the Tape Deck Monster would start summoning even more monsters than there were already, and things just got worse. The only thing he could do right now was to stay undercover and hope Hashibiro returned soon with the help he'd promised.

He perked up a little when he heard the sound of approaching feet. It sounded like a lot of feet, and his spirits began to rise.

A moment later, Hashibiro swooped over to him saying, "They're here—I found them!"

Then a crowd of assorted boys came rushing towards him and stopped short as they got a look at him. He wondered vaguely what was going through their heads right now. It was admittedly a weird moment for them, and not everyone could take encountering a man with an axe bigger than he was with equanimity.

Then one member of the group detached itself and went barreling towards him shouting, "Big Brother!"

And then an unfamiliar boy was hugging Gora for all he was worth. Only... only he wasn't unfamiliar, not really. Gora would have known that enthusiasm anywhere. He managed to pull back enough to take in that unruly golden hair, those innocent eyes, that beaming smile. The face had lost some of its childish softness, but he never could have confused it for anyone else's.

"Yumoto?" he said wonderingly. "Is that really you?"

Yumoto nodded eagerly. "That's right! I'm all grown up now! And I brought all my friends with me!" He gestured at the crowd of other

teenaged boys who stood clustered a short distance away, watching the drama.

"Yo," said one of them, a blond boy with drowsy blue eyes and a general air of dishevelment. "You don't know us yet, but we're going to be your best customers someday."

A stylishly dressed young man with a shock of pink hair said, "We're the Earth Defense Club. That's En, that's Atsushi, this here's my best buddy Io, and I'm Ryuu. Those three are the Caerula Adamas-Arima, Akoya, and Atsushi's boyfriend Kinshiro."

"Hey!"

"Well, he is," said Ryuu imperturbably. "And anyway, these two space cases are Aki and Haru. They're your biggest fans. Apparently they used to watch all the monster fighting you did on TV, and you rescued them from some kind of giant crab or something, and now they're just obsessed. Seriously, I have been in their rooms, and there's like, posters and action figures everywhere. It's kind of creepy, honestly, but if you need somebody on your side right now these are definitely the guys you want."

Most of this went over Gora's head, but a few words stuck. Yes, the crab incident at the theme park hadn't happened that long ago, and he *did* remember a pair of fair-haired twin boys who looked a lot like the teenagers who were even now gazing at him with such reverence.

"I do remember you!" he said. "I gave you guys a rice ball."

The twins looked delighted.

"He recognized us!" said Aki happily.

"Don't worry about a thing, Gora-san!" said

Haru. "Whatever's going on, we'll sort it out for you!"

"It will be an honor to fight alongside you," Aki agreed.

A second group of boys, who had been hanging back from Yumoto and his friends, seemed to feel that they had been ignored long enough.

"For what it's worth, we're here to help too," said the boy with the dreamy eyes and lilac hair. "We're from further ahead in time than they are, so basically I don't think we've been born yet in your time, but in our time you definitely run the best bathhouse in Binan so we're pretty keen on you not dying now. Anyway, that otter your brother is carrying around is Karls. He doesn't look it but he's a king, and we're Karls' Knights. I'm Kyotaro, that's Ryouma, those two there are Ichiro and Taishi. Don't mind them, they're always like that. And that's Nanao. Probably best not to mind him either. And the blue fox is called Furanui, and those three guys with him are his knights, Ata, Taiju, and Maasa."

Gora expressed his thanks to all of them for coming. He was starting to feel better. He had spent so much time doing this job with only Hashibiro to help, and now he had all of these people who were willing to stand up for him—one of them his own brother. It would be nice, just for once, to be fighting as part of a team. He stood up.

"All right," he said. "Let's go find this monster and show him a thing or two, shall we?"

★★★

"Is that it?" said En. "He doesn't look so tough."

This was a fair enough comment. The Tape Deck Monster appeared to be lounging in the school garden listening to itself. Atsushi vaguely recognized the song as one that had been popular around this time.

"Don't let him fool you," said Gora. "Every time I think I've got him beat, he starts bringing back monsters I've already beaten before and I have to fight them all over again."

"Hmm," said Kinshiro. "Does he do it right away, or does he wait until he's losing the fight?"

"He waited until he was losing at first," said Gora. "I think now he's liable to start summoning them as soon as he sees me."

"Then I don't think we should all rush out at once," said Kinshiro. "You go out first, and the rest of us will come in as needed. We can tire him out and then swarm him once he's been worn down."

Ata nodded. "Turn his own tactics against him. Good thinking."

Gora nodded. "Okay, I'm game to give it a try. I'll go and challenge him, and you guys get yourselves organized."

He hefted his axe and went bounding away. Atsushi had to admit, he was impressed. He had not had a lot of opportunities to watch Gora in a real fight, not unless you counted his brief stint as the Wood-Chopper Monster and a few recorded flashbacks that had clearly been heavily edited by TV Universe. Seeing him in action in real life was an impressive sight. He wasn't just here because some weird talking

animal was forcing him. He was a real hero, and he was good at it.

"Kinda makes you feel inferior, doesn't it?" said En. The tone of his voice suggested that it didn't really bother him that much.

"He's definitely more impressive than we ever were," Atsushi agreed.

The twins nodded.

"See? See? That's what we've been trying to tell you!" said Haru.

En gave them a look. "Just for that, you can be the ones to go fight the first monster."

"All right!" the twins cheered.

Sure enough, a moment later, the Tape Deck Monster pressed a button on top of what was probably its head. There was an odd chattering noise as of a tape being played backwards at high speed, and then the air warped and glowed. Three monsters appeared out of nowhere. They looked a bit confused, but when they saw Gora they seemed to decide that whatever was going on, it was probably his fault. He braced himself and prepared to defend against the onslaught.

"Don't worry, we've got you covered!" said Aki.

In a flash, the two of them had transformed and bounded onto the battlefield. Now the battle was even, and Gora flashed them a quick grin as they joined the fray.

"Thanks, fellas!" he said. "You're the best!"

Haru grinned at him. "Anything for you!"

The Tape Deck Monster was looking confused, in that way that meant in a minute it was going to start looking really annoyed.

"Where did those guys come from?" it demanded.

"We're Maximum Gorar's friends!" said Haru.

"We'll be there if he needs us, even if we have to cross time and space to do it!" Aki chimed in.

The Tape Deck Monster scowled. "Well, there's still only three of you! I can bring a lot more monsters than this!"

It pressed the button again, and this time five more monsters appeared.

"I guess that's our cue!" said Atsushi. His friends nodded. Atsushi raised his Loveracelet to his lips and said the magic words, and a moment later he and his friends were bounding onto the field. Atsushi found himself squaring off with what looked like a seriously annoyed bottle of white-out. It brandished a brush at him, and he had to move quickly to avoid being splattered with gunk.

The Tape Deck Monster was beginning to look stressed.

"Where do you people keep coming from?" it demanded.

"Look, you messed with the wrong guy," said Ryuu. He was currently fencing with an oversized light bulb and not doing too badly at it.

Io nodded. "Anyone who knows him would want to come to his rescue if he needed help."

"Because he'd do the same for us!" Atsushi agreed.

"Well, you haven't won yet!" said the Tape Deck Monster. It seemed to be breathing harder now as it mustered its strength. "Let's see you deal with this!"

With a visible effort, it summoned another swarm of monsters. The schoolyard was beginning to get crowded. En shouted over the hubbub, "You're up, new guys!"

"Guess that means us," said Kyotaro. He glanced at his otter friend. "Better do your thing."

Atsushi missed what happened next because he was distracted by the monster he'd been battling, but when he looked around again, five warriors dressed something like fairy-tale elves had swarmed onto the battlefield.

"Okay," said En, "and I thought our costumes were ridiculous."

"I dunno," said Ryuu. "I think they're kinda cute, myself."

"You want to trade?" Taishi shouted back to him.

The Tape Deck Monster was stomping in a circle in frustration.

"No, no, no! This is not fair!" it protested. "Okay... okay, one more time!"

It pressed the button again. There was an unpleasant squealing noise, followed by the distinctive sound of tape coming unspooled in a hurry. The monster yelped as its lid popped open and a tangle of twisted tape fountained out.

"All right, it's working!" Ryouma cheered. "Come on, guys, let's clear all these monsters out while we've got the chance!"

There was a blur of motion, and suddenly the Caerula Adamas and the Edelstein were on the field, zipping from place to place, distracting monsters long enough for someone else to deal them a disabling blow. A moment later, Atsushi saw two more figures, unfamiliar young men who

bore no weapons at all but seemed to be using some sort of magic to make the monsters hover in the air until someone could knock them senseless.

"Who are those guys?" he asked.

"Oh, didn't you know?" said Nanao as he breezed past. "That's Karls and Furanui."

"I thought they were animals!" said Atsushi.

"Only when they want to be," said Nanao.

The battle was definitely going in the heroes' favor now. Atsushi gave his own monster a final wallop that sent it sprawling. From where he stood, he could see that boy Maasa, who had looked so sweet and innocent, attacking an animate doughnut with what seemed like unnecessary violence. Arima and Taiju had cornered an amalgamation of paperclips and were taking turns menacing it with their swords. Yumoto appeared to be fighting two monsters simultaneously with no trouble at all, powered solely by his determination not to let anything touch his brother. And of course, in the middle of it all was Maximum Gorar himself, flanked by his two self-appointed bodyguards, who were clearly having the time of their lives.

A final monster went down to a blast from Ichiro and Taishi's magic wands.

"Thanks, fellas," said Gora, raising his axe. "I'll take it from here!"

And it really was a joy to watch him at work. He moved across the field in a blur, hacking and slashing. Each monster he dispatched wavered, glowed, and vanished back to whatever time it had come from. Before the last one had even vanished, the entire team had begun closing in on the Tape Deck Monster. It backed away, looking panicky.

"No, wait, you can't do this!" it said. "I won't let you! If I can't stop you with monsters, then I'll use something else!"

"I'd like to see you try it!" said Haru.

"No matter what you throw at us, we'll throw it right back at you!" Aki added.

"Oh, really?" said the monster. "Then how about *this* for a throwback..."

Even as it spoke, people were already moving towards it, trying to stop it, but it was already too late. Atsushi watched as the world rippled, bent...

...and went backwards...

★★★

...until he was in the schoolroom again.

He looked around, confused. What was he doing here? It took him a few moments to remember why this place seemed so familiar. This was his old schoolroom, and he was a child once more. With a strange sense of fatality, he reached into his pocket and was unsurprised when his hand touched a slip of paper. It was the KoKoKaRa coupon, and today was the day when everything had gone wrong.

What am I supposed to do now? he wondered.

If the day played out the way he remembered it, then this would be the afternoon when he and En first became friends, but also the day when Kinshiro would all but stop speaking to him for the next few years. He didn't want to go through all that again, but was there any way to avoid it? And if there was, could he do it without losing his future best friend along the way?

It seemed like it was worth a try. When the final bell rang, he watched as Kinshiro approached him.

"Say, Atchan," he said. "Do you want to hang out with me today? You could come over to my place, if you want."

"I wish I could," said Atsushi, "but it's like this: I've got this coupon for the curry place I like, and it's only good today. I know you don't like curry, but... well, maybe you could pick up something else you do like and we could eat outside? Or we could play together another day."

Kinshiro looked a bit surprised. "You really want to eat curry that much?"

Atsushi felt himself blushing. "Well, it is my favorite. But if it's really important to you, than I guess..."

"No, it's okay," Kinshiro decided. "I'll get some dumplings and we can eat at the park. It might be fun to have a picnic."

Atsushi beamed. "Okay! Thanks, Kinchan!"

Kinshiro smiled shyly back. "I don't mind putting up with curry if it means I get to spend time with you."

They walked out of the school hand in hand, as they so often did. Atsushi was happy. Already his other life was starting to feel like a bad dream. Surely this was how things were really supposed to have happened..

As they left the school, Atsushi noticed a boy standing by himself under one of the trees in the schoolyard.

"Isn't he in our class?" he said.

Kinshiro looked where Atsushi was pointing.

"You're right, he is. He's the one who's

always asking such strange questions," he said.

"I don't think I've ever seen him with any friends before," said Atsushi. "I wonder if he's lonely."

Kinshiro gave him a look that was half fond, half exasperated. "You would make friends with anyone, wouldn't you?"

Atsushi grinned, a bit sheepishly. "Well, he's interesting, isn't he? He thinks about things in different ways."

"Well, you can ask him if he wants to come along, if you want," said Kinshiro. The words were casual, but Atsushi could pick up the undertones lurking beneath them: that Kinshiro was still fundamentally a lonely person. Atsushi was his only real friend. Somewhere under that cool facade was a boy who was hoping that if he got to know another misfit like himself, they might end up getting to like each other.

Atsushi walked over to En.

"Hey," he said. "What are you doing?"

"Just thinking," said En. He was staring up at the branches of the tree as though they were something he could read.

Atsushi accepted this at face value.

"Okay," he said. "Anyway, sorry if this is a weird question, but do you like curry?"

The dreamy face took on a spark of animation.

"Of course I like curry," said En. "Curry is the best."

"Well, I was going to KoKoKaRa to get curry," said Atsushi. "And Kinchan wasn't going to get curry but he was going to come

along anyway and pick up dumplings or something, and then we were going to picnic in the park together. You can come too, if you want."

A grin spread over that normally impassive face. It was amazing how it changed his whole countenance.

"Sounds good," he said. "Let's go."

So the three boys set out on their adventure together, chatting and laughing like people who had always known they were meant to be best friends. Atsushi felt the future slipping into a new configuration. He and Kinshiro weren't going to be separated. He and Kinshiro and En were going to be friends, now and forever, and everything was going to be perfect...

★★★

"Gero, gero! Dirty little frog!" the voices jeered.

Tears stung Akoya's eyes. "I'm not a frog and I'm not dirty!"

"Yes, you are! You make us want to throw up!" the bigger boys teased.

Akoya seethed. He didn't deserve any of this. It wasn't his fault he had a funny name, so why were they always picking on him? Well, he knew the answer to that: because he was soft and girlish and had no friends to stick up for him...

But even as he thought that, a voice said, "Hey, would you guys be quiet? You're making too much noise."

"It's very unbecoming," said another voice. "Some of us have serious things to think about."

Akoya looked up in alarm, expecting even more trouble. Two boys—one fair and serious, the other red-headed and lively—had arrived on the scene. The bullies did not seem to want to carry on in front of an audience. The redheaded one had the spunky look of someone who might start a brawl just for the fun of it, and the serious one looked like a boy who'd run for a teacher while they were distracted.

"We weren't having any fun here anyway," said one of the bullies, and the whole crowd melted away.

The redhead grinned. "Man, they were losers, huh? Anyway, I'm Ryuu, and this is Io. Do you want to come play with us for a while? They won't pick on you if you're with somebody."

Akoya looked at him suspiciously. "Do you really want to? Or are you just saying that?"

"Well, I don't mind," said Io.

"Sure, tag along," said Ryuu, laughing. "The more the merrier!"

He reached out his hand, and Akoya took it, and followed them into a future where he would always have friends...

★★★

Yumoto was running down a path and could not, at first, remember why. Gradually, it came to him: that he was at Binan Land, he'd heard a commotion, and he'd run to look for his brother.

He hadn't looked very far before he almost collided with a tall man in a tan suit.

"Easy there," he said. "Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I'm looking for my brother," Yumoto said.

"Is that so? Well, I'm looking for my sons. I think you might be safer if we both looked together, don't you?"

Yumoto, trusting soul that he was, agreed immediately. The two of them set off together in the direction of the noise.

By the time they got there, they found Gora talking to two little boys who were gazing up at him worshipfully.

"Well, there you two are," said the tall man. "I'm glad you're all right. Did you make a friend?"

The twins agreed readily that Gora was their friend. He had been very kind to them and given them a rice ball to eat.

"Well, that's just great," said Mr. Beppu. To Gora, he said, "I hope these two didn't cause you any trouble."

"No trouble at all," Gora assured him. He smiled down at Yumoto. "And thanks for looking after my little brother for me."

Yumoto flashed his brother a smile before trotting over to meet his brother's new friends.

"Hi!" he said. "I'm Yumoto! Do you want to come over and play?"

Gora laughed. "Yumoto, you can't just invite people over when you haven't even met them yet!"

"But they're your friends," Yumoto insisted. "And friends get to come over!"

The twins looked up at their father. "Can we, Dad? Can we please?"

Their father said, "Well..."

And that was when Yumoto had a sudden flash of the future: the twins, coming over every day to play with him and Gora. Mr. Beppu getting a job and moving away, offering to pay Gora if he would let the twins stay with him and Yumoto so they could finish their schooling in a familiar place. All four of them growing up together as family.

Yeah, he thought, that's how it should have been...

★★★

When Kyotaro came to, he was covered in mud, and what he thought was, *Oh, it's this again.*

He knew how this story went. He and Ryouma were going to go to the Kurotama for a bath, Ata would be shy and hang back and ultimately be left behind, and Kyotaro would lose one of his best friends for years. It would take something like a literal miracle to bring them together again. But it didn't really have to be that way, did it?

Did it?

The obvious answer was that no, it didn't have to be that way at all. He could loiter and make sure that Ata was with him the whole time. He could forget the whole idea of going to the bathhouse and go home and take a shower instead. He could choose to make it not happen, right now.

He thought about this. He thought about it very hard.

"Hey," he said aloud. "Do you guys remember doing this once before?"

There was an uncomfortable pause.

"Yeah," said Ryouma. "Come to think of it, I do."

"Me too," said Ata. "This was the day we stopped speaking to each other."

"That's what I thought," said Kyotaro. "And those guys who took our picture just now—did they seem familiar to you?"

Ata frowned. "Now that you mention it, they did..."

"Oh!" said Ryouma, lighting up. "I know what you mean now! Those were the guys from before—the Earth Defense Club, the Battle Lovers, the ones with the talking Wombat!"

Kyotaro nodded. "And we're here because that monster was playing around with time and rewind us. Right now, we're supposed to be looking at this whole situation and thinking about how happy we'd be if we had done things differently. And maybe he's right. Maybe we didn't have to do it the way we did." He raised his voice. "But we don't have to do it this way, either. Listen up, monster! You can't do things this way! It isn't going to work!"

★★★

And the echoes of those words rang out across the universe...

Somewhere, Atsushi looked up, and thought, *That's right. It never could have happened like this...*

Somewhere Akoya was thinking, *No, it never would have been this way...*

Somewhere, Yumoto thought, *He's right. This isn't the way it went...*

And all around them, the universe began to fall to pieces...

★★★

And suddenly they were all there, right back in the schoolyard again. The monster goggled at them with its oversized tape-reel eyes.

"How did you get back here?" it demanded. "I sent you back to the past!"

Kyotaro shrugged. "We came back."

"Yes, but why? You shouldn't have wanted to!" the monster protested. "I gave you something good! Doesn't everyone want to go back in time and fix their mistakes?"

"Of course we do," said Kinshiro quietly. "Every day, I wish I could go back and fix things so I wouldn't have lost so much time with Atsushi. But I can't."

"But I would have let you!" the monster insisted.

"Our new friend is right, though," said Io. "It doesn't work like that."

"Why not?" it complained.

Kyotaro shrugged again. "I mean, it stands to reason. The thing is, yeah, I made a bad mistake in the past, and I'm sorry about it. I wish I could go back and make it not happen, because it hurt Ata and me both when we stopped being friends. But at the time, I didn't know what I was doing was going to hurt his feelings, or I wouldn't have done it. The only reason I know now was because I already made the mistake and I know how it turned out."

I can't go back and fix it, because knowing I ought to fix it requires breaking it all in the first place."

Atsushi nodded. "I know I made a really bad mistake once, but I did it because I was a little kid and I didn't know any better. I made the best choice I knew how to make at the time, but if I really could rewind time, then I'd make the same mistake every time because that was the sort of person I used to be. The only reason I know better now was because I messed up in the past and learned something from it."

"Senpai's right," said Yumoto. "I think maybe sometimes the best way to have a good future is to make some mistakes in the past."

Ichiro looked at Ryu and whispered, "Does that make sense?"

"It works for him," said Ryu. "Generally we just let him do his thing and not worry about it."

Gora, meanwhile, was approaching the monster with the gentleness that was his hallmark. It said something about him that he could put over a non-threatening vibe even while carrying about twenty-five pounds of broadaxe like it was a toothpick.

"Why are you so focused on the past?" he asked kindly. "Aren't you excited for the future?"

"No," the monster admitted. "The future is scary. I never really know what's going to happen next. I just keep thinking about all the times I screwed up in the past, and I think, if I could just go back and fix those mistakes then I'd have nothing to worry about..."

"The future is scary sometimes," Gora admitted. "I feel that way sometimes, too."

"You do?" the monster asked.

"All the time," said Gora. "I worry about going to school and keeping the family business going and taking care of my little brother, and I worry a lot about being able to protect the earth. So you see, you've actually done me a big favor, and I'm really grateful to you."

The monster looked puzzled. "Me? What did I do?"

"Well, you were the one who started messing around with time," said Gora, "and that let Hashibiro-senpai bring all these people from the future. So now I know that in the future, the business is still going to be open and I'll have lots of good customers. I know my brother is going to grow up well and happy and have lots of friends. I know I'm going to have lots of friends. All these people came out just to help me because they know we're going to be friends someday. And I know that the Earth is going to be safe, and that people are going to go on protecting it for years into the future. Thanks to you, I know all the things I've been worrying about are going to be okay. Right now, I'm really looking forward to the future!"

"He's right," said Atsushi. "You shouldn't go around thinking the future is going to be bad just because you don't know what it's going to be. I didn't think Kinchan and I would ever sort things out between us, but we did and now things are better than ever."

Kyotaro nodded. "And I never could have guessed how things would have worked out with Ata."

"There certainly have been a lot of surprises," said Akoya, "but I think if it had all been left up to us to choose how it would turn out, we might have done a lot worse."

"The point is," said Gora, "that you can't make the future better by constantly worrying about the past. All you can do is focus on making the best choices you can when they're in front of you. If you find yourself worrying too much, just remember—maybe there are bad things coming that you can't plan for, but there also are amazing things coming that you can't even begin to imagine. As long as you remember that, you can get through the tough times."

The monster seemed to relax a little. "Maybe you're right. Maybe I have been too wrapped up in thinking about the past. I ought to think more about the future!"

Gora smiled. "Then are you ready to be a human again and not a monster?"

The Tape Deck Monster nodded.

"Okay, then," said Gora, backing up a few paces. "here we go..."

A moment later, there was nothing left of the monster but a boy in a school uniform asleep on the grass.

"Another flawless win by Maximum Gorar!" said Aki.

Gora smiled at him. "With a lot of help from his friends. It sure has been fun, not having to do all the fighting myself, for a change."

"It was our honor, Gora-san!" said Haru.

"Yeah, this was really fun!" said Yumoto. Then his face fell a little. "I guess we're going to have to go home now, huh?"

Gora ruffled his hair. "Hey, don't feel too

bad. I'll be waiting for you back in your own time too, right?"

Yumoto nodded, perking up a little. "Yeah... and I'll be waiting back at home for you too, won't I?"

"Of course," said Gora. "But it's been fun, getting to see you all grown up like this."

Yumoto giggled. "You don't look that much different now than you will back in my time." He beamed. "But no matter where we are or how old I am, you'll always be my big brother."

"And I'll always be proud of you," said Gora, and pulled him into a hug.

They stayed that way for a few seconds, until one of the twins cleared his throat in a meaningful sort of way. The brothers separated, looking sheepish.

"Seriously, though," he said, "it's been fun having all of you here. I can't wait to meet you all in the future."

"Won't be that long!" said En confidently. "I mean, it can't be that much longer before Atsushi and I start hanging around the Kurotama."

"That does raise a question," said Nanao. "Are we going to remember all of this when we get home? Isn't it going to upset the time-space continuum, or some such thing?"

"Generally not," said Hashibiro. "In cases like this, usually what will happen is that you will forget most of the details of what happened here until your timelines re-converge. If all of you should meet again someday in the future, it will come back to you."

Nanao laughed. "That's something to look

forward to. I'll see you all in about twenty years."

Ryuu grinned. "That is probably a record for me—the furthest in the future I've set a date! Sure, let's meet again someday!"

"Promise that when you remember, you'll come by the Kurotama," said Gora. "We'll have a party!"

"Count on it," said Taiju. "We'll meet again, don't you worry."

"For now, I think we'd better work on getting home," said Karls, showing a surprising streak of practicality.

He, Furanui, Wombat, and Hashibiro consulted for a few minutes, and eventually seemed to come to an agreement.

"All right," said Hashibiro. "Everyone stand as close together as you can in the same groupings you arrived in—no, not you, Gora, you have to stay here! Yes, that's better. All right, it's time to go home."

"Bye, everyone!" Yumoto called. "See you again someday!"

"Bye, guys!" Ichiro called back. "See you soon!"

"Goodbye everyone!" Gora called. "Remember, you promised to come back and see me again!"

"We definitely won't forget!" Haru called.

Then the world rippled, wavered...

...and they were gone.

★★★

For a moment, Kyotaro wondered if he'd dozed off somehow. It wouldn't have been the first

time he'd fallen asleep somewhere peculiar. Falling asleep standing up, though, would be a new one, especially in the middle of the changing room at the Kurotama. He blinked a few times while his thoughts reshuffled themselves. He had been in the middle of doing something, hadn't he? They'd had their regular afternoon bath, and then Karls and Furanui had shown up, and then...

"Oh, we're back," he said. "Well, that sure was strange, wasn't it?"

Ata gave him an amused look. "Is that all you can say? You traveled through time to help a team of warriors from the past save the world, and all you can think of is that it was strange? You really are imperturbable."

"Best way to be," said Kyotaro.

"Did it really happen?" asked Ichiro. "I mean, we didn't just dream it all, did we? Or is this going to turn out to be one of those weird alternate timelines where it happened somewhere else?"

"Well, there's one way to find out," said Taiju, who was pretty imperturbable himself. "All we have to do is go ask Mr. Hakone if he remembers what happened. If he does, it did, and if he doesn't..."

"He'll think we're a bit weird," Taishi concluded, "which won't be too far off base."

"So who's going to ask him?" Ryouma wondered. "I don't want Mr. Hakone to think I'm weird!"

"Well, Maasa's not going to do it!" said Maasa.

They were still arguing about it when the door to the dressing room opened and Gora himself looked in.

"Oh, good, you're back," he said. "Yumoto just called and told me to tell you the others are on their way. And I made rice balls. You like rice balls, don't you?"

"Uh... sure?" said Kyotaro.

Gora nodded. "That's good. Just come into the living room when you're ready to eat. I don't think everyone is going to fit in the kitchen."

He wandered off again, message delivered. Everyone looked at each other.

"Well," said Kyotaro, "it looks like we've been invited to dinner."

Everyone finished putting their clothes in order and wandered out into the foyer. No one had quite wanted to mention that they didn't know where the Hakones' living room actually was. But it turned out not to matter, because they had only been dithering there for a few seconds before the front door banged open and Yumoto came bounding in, closely followed by a crowd of other people. Some of them were carrying dishes, as if they had thought they'd been invited to a pot-luck. They were all chattering and laughing happily, and while ten years had changed some of the fine details, their features were still recognizable.

"Hey, you made it!" said Atsushi. "Some of us weren't really sure you were going to turn up."

"Never mind us being here," said Nanao. "How did you know we would be here?"

"It was just like Hashibiro said," En explained. "After we got back from our time-trip, we kind of forgot about everything that happened."

"But we all woke up this morning with our

memories back in place," Atsushi added. "So we all called each other up and asked if we were all remembering the same thing, and it turns out we were, so we figured today must be the day when our timeline and yours finally caught up to each other."

"And we did promise," Arima concluded.

"We brought snacks," said Akoya, holding up what appeared to be a basket of pastries.

Great," said Kyotaro. "We didn't know there was going to be a party today, so we didn't bring anything."

"Speak for yourself," said Maasa. "Maasa always brings snacks."

They all trooped into the living room together and started trying to find places to put the food and sit down. It was not easy to arrange.

"This won't do at all," said Karls. "Let us handle this!"

He and Furanui consulted for a bit, then arranged themselves back to back and raised their paws high. Brightly colored sparks streamed from their fingertips, and the room rearranged itself to accommodate a larger table and several extra chairs. The streamers and balloons were probably Karls's own contribution.

Just as everyone was settling into their places, there was one more surprise. Light began to gather near the ceiling, and the people who were standing closest to it all hurried to get out of the way—all but Yumoto, who all but flew to get underneath it in time.

"Gotcha!" he said jubilantly.

A cross voice said, "Oh, really, of all the places I could land...!"

En laughed. "You say that, but we all know how you really feel."

Wombat gave him a look, as best he could when he was lying on the floor with Yumoto cuddling him.

"I suppose one can learn to miss anything," he said. Then he laughed. "All right, I missed you all. Especially you, Yumoto."

"Well, looks like we're all here now," said Gora, surveying the chaos benignly. "And we've got enough food to feed an army, and we're all friends here so there's no need to stand on ceremony. Everybody grab a plate and dig in!"

Everyone—human and beast, new friends and old—all of them scrabbled to seize a plate and fill it with whatever they liked best. The house became lively with the sounds of three generations of heroes catching up, comparing notes, and generally having a good time.

Time might pass—might even go in the wrong direction sometimes—but one thing seemed certain: whenever there was trouble in Binan, someone was going to step up to save it.

Time and time again.

Home is where the heart is

magiccatprincess

"And you'll be at the airport at 12:00 right?"

Naruko Io looked at the darkening sky through the window. He resisted the urge to snort. Atsushi always double checked. At least he did now that he was a parent. "Kinugawa-san, when have you ever known me to waste time?"

There was a chuckle on the end of the line and Io could hear Atsushi rummaging through the kitchen. Likely already preparing dinner for him, En and their little one.

"I will see you tomorrow. I've got to get off the train." Io said wincing when he heard something drop followed by what was definitely a wailing toddler.

"See you tomorrow, gotta go!" Atsushi shouted before hanging up.

Io had made himself a fortune over the years. Plenty would call him impressive.

Io found what Atsushi was doing far more remarkable. Working, child rearing and managing a household was unending.

Not to mention he was also in charge of the first ever Earth Defense Club reunion. Yes this included the former student council as well. They were, in Yumoto's words, honorary battle lovers after all.

This wasn't the first time the group attempted to all meet up in the past years, but

something had always come up. Especially with so many of them settled in different parts of the country or even outside of it.

Arima was the only one of Binan High's former student council to have stayed in the country returning to Binan after a short time at college in Tokyo. Not for lack of trying on his family's part. Io hadn't been too involved at the time, but he could tell the other was much happier using his business degree to open his own flower shop than by working for his family.

He wasn't the only one who defied his family's wishes. Kusatsu-san had indeed become a lawyer like he was supposed to. A criminal defense one. Offering aid to everyone who'd need a lawyer.

Then there was Akoya who after finishing college decided to stay in Paris. He'd released his first Line of Pearlite perfume three years ago, the brand kept expanding ever since.

In that sense, caerula addams had indeed set out to change their own worlds and succeeded.

It was hard not to be envious.

Io shivered as he exited the strain station. Around him the streets were buzzing, still full of people despite the temperature. Couples holding hands or people doing holiday shopping.

Pretty Christmas lights glowed softly above him, somehow it made Io feel... grey.

A dull businessman among the people rushing to homes where they likely had people waiting for them.

Once again Io had to remind himself why he bothered going to the office.

It was kind of pathetic, but going to the

office had simply become an excuse to be among people.

Not that the meaningless chit chat at the coffee machine was particularly enlightening. It was better than spending all day at home until suddenly remembering it was 20:00 and he'd forgotten both lunch and dinner nor had he spoken to anyone all day.

In the past two weeks leading up to this reunion, Io had had more meaningful interactions when talking to his old senior than in the past two months. What did that say about his social life?

Things had seemed so clear in high school. Io had followed his set out plan. He'd studied abroad as had always been the plan. Had even spent a few years working at wall street until deciding he simply couldn't settle there permanently.

He'd gotten... bored? Not bored. Restless, listless. Homesick.

There wasn't anything in America that home didn't have too.

At least that was what Io thought. Home had changed to. Or perhaps he had changed too little.

Gods he really missed-

Io stopped walking, the huge billboard hanging from the building catching his attention.

Loose pink hair framing a face with that same, somehow unchanged grin. A bit of skin showed past the white blouse which was slipping past the model's shoulder. Ryuu held up a glass as an invitation.

The words 'you look lonely' written underneath in pretty pink cursive.

Harsh.

Io gazed at the poster, looking into those warm brown eyes as if waiting to be consumed himself. It was ridiculous, for his heart to be pounding like this. It wasn't like he and Ryuuk didn't talk anymore.

In fact, Io snapped a photo of the billboard and sent it to his friend.

He got a reply not even a minute later.

'It's already hanging in Japan?! OMG I look awesome!'

Io paused, he calculated the time difference between Japan and New York then shook his head.

'Shouldn't you be asleep?'

'Some last minute packing then def bedtime. So excited to be back tomorrow!'

Some days, Io really regretted encouraging Ryuuk to take that modeling offer. It was a great opportunity for his friend, something Ryuuk had worked for. Only a fool would have turned it down.

Yet Ryuuk had asked his opinion first.

Somehow in that moment, Io knew Ryuuk would reject the offer if Io said no.

He hadn't considered saying no till he had already answered. Already told Ryuuk to go take this chance. Even if it meant Ryuuk would have to move abroad.

Not once had he considered asking his friend to stay. Not until he watched the plane take off.

A fourteen hour time difference was nearly impossible to work around with, but they'd made it work while Io went to America.

Turns out modeling was a lot different from sitting behind a desk all day. Ryuuk worked odd hours. There was hardly any time for video calls.

They texted though.

At least twice a week Io received a text from his best friend. A far cry from their daily talks from before. But they were managing. Everything was fine.

Tomorrow would be the first time in years that they'd see each other face to face again.

'I look forward to it too. But get some rest first.'

'Worrywort :P but will do!'

Io was in the process of putting his phone away when there was another text.

'See you tomorrow Io! ♥♥♥♥♥♥'

Try as he might, Io couldn't stop himself from smiling at his phone. "See you tomorrow Ryuuk."

He couldn't sleep.

It was 2 in the morning, Io had gone to bed hours ago and was still just laying there. Mind going back to that poster.

Warm brown eyes.

The soft pink hair framing his face.

That somehow delicate looking exposed shoulder...

Are you lonely?

Io groaned and turned around smashing his face against his pillow. This was ridiculous.

He would literally be seeing Ryuu tomorrow. There was no reason to overthink or be plagued by... posters.

Yes, he missed Ryuu.

Yes, his life wasn't turning out the way he had envisioned when he was 17.

And yes, he was lonely.

He didn't need a poster to tell him that.

Io sighed once again thinking back to when Ryuu asked him if he should leave. Io had only been back to Japan for a few few weeks at the time.

"It's an amazing opportunity. Why are you asking me?"

"Because your opinion matters to me jerk." Ryuu grumbled, crossing his arms and turning his face away, lips twisted in a pout.

They were at the park close to their old high school, Ryuu had called him over. They were supposed to have dinner together, but Ryuu wanted to get the news out first. He was never good at keeping things to himself. That wasn't true, Io could tell when there was something bothering his friend. Io hummed thinking Ryuu's words over. "Why?"

Ryuu had been trying to start of his modeling career for a while now, this was a huge chance. Why wasn't he jumping and rushing in like Io expected?

"What do you mean why?" Ryuu grimaced, out of habit his hand went up to tug at his earring. "Your thoughts matter... you just got back."

Io frowned. "Don't put your dreams on hold on my account."

"I'm not! It's just..." Ryuu shook his head. "Never mind, you think I should accept?"

"Yes." Io smiled. "I'll be rooting for you."

It seemed so simple at the time. Now Io couldn't help but wonder if Ryuu expected something else from him.

"Do you think it's big enough? What if they don't see it?"

"Yumoto, you could see that sign from space." En took another step back to avoid accidentally being smacked by Yumoto's giant 'Battle lover Reunion!' sign. Indeed the cardboard sign was the size of a grown man, the letters painted in bright bold colors impossible to miss.

Atsushi, Io, Kinshirou and Arima followed En's idea and took a step back giving Yumoto space to move the sign.

Atsushi couldn't help but chuckle. "He might be as tall as Gora-san, but he's still the same Yumoto."

"Some things never change." Kinshirou nodded pensively. Io wondered if the man meant it as something good or not.

Soon enough two familiar figures walked out of the building, somehow the familiar sight made Io release tension he hadn't known he was holding.

Akoya with his long hair in a loose bun and

pastel outfit, loose frilly pants and long coat, Ryuu with the sunglasses and odd poofy hat. Bickering back and forth which they'd clearly had been doing since they'd run into each other at the terminal.

The two pink haired men stopped walking when they saw Yumoto's giant sign. For at least five seconds they stood there and stared. Then the both promptly turned around heading back into the airport.

"No! Senpais you're going the wrong way!" Yumoto dropped the sign and after the two.

Five minutes later Yumoto returned carrying his friend's suitcases, Akoya and Ryuu a little behind him.

Akoya wasted no time and walked straight to Arima who immediately held out the large bouquet he brought. "It's been a long time."

"Too long." Akoya smiled looking at the flowers. It was a beautiful arrangement, bold colors yet still elegant. Akoya plucked a red carnation from the bouquet and tucked it behind his ear. "That will do."

"Agreed."

Ryuu grinned and bound over to the group, eyes briefly trailing Yumoto who easily carried his and Akoya's luggage. He whistled. "You weren't kidding when you said Yumoto grew tall."

"Still not as tall as An-chan though." Yumoto supplied, gravely acknowledging the one centimeter height difference between him and his brother.

Ryuu hummed, removed his sunglasses and looked at his friends. "What's up? Did you miss me?"

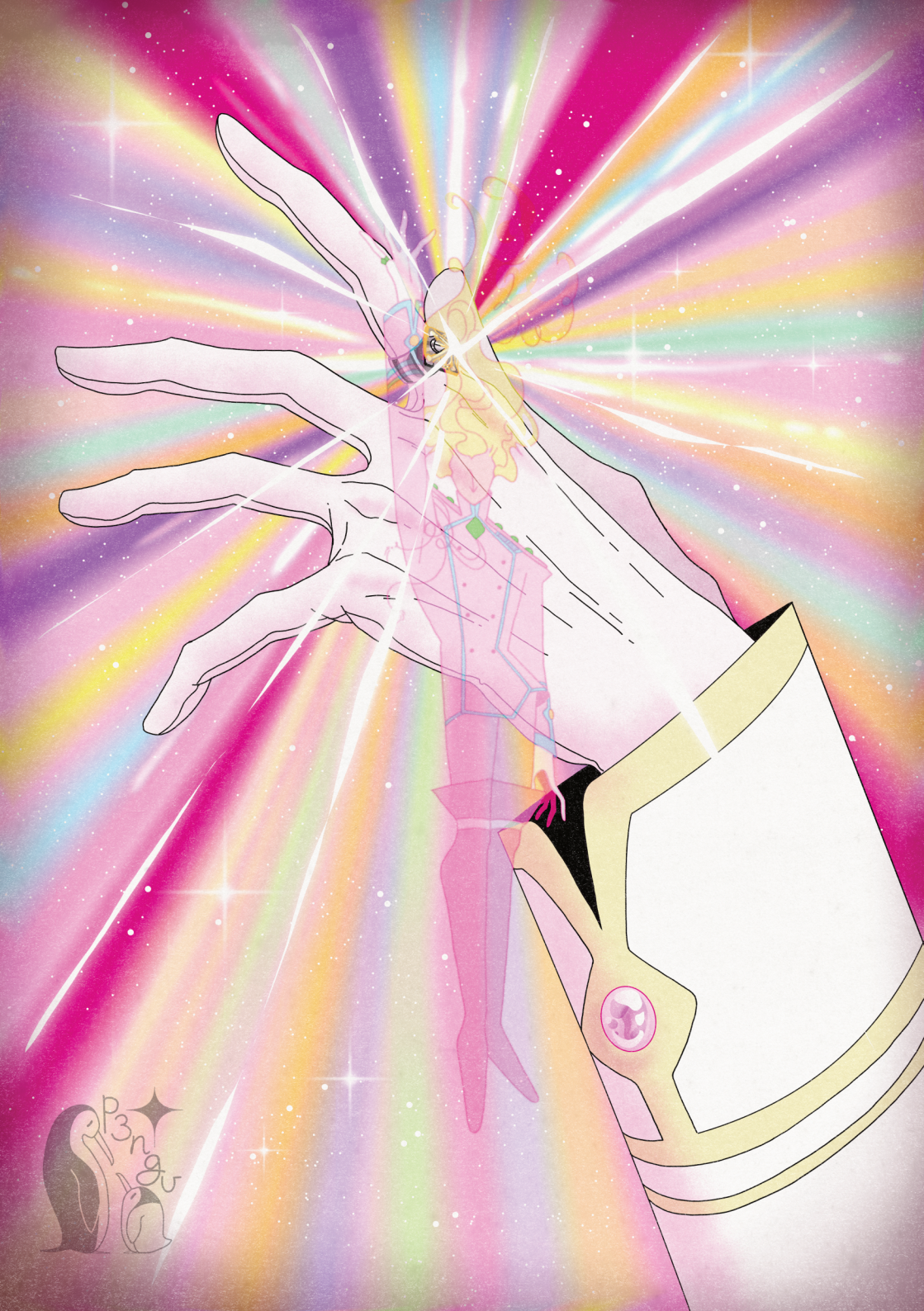
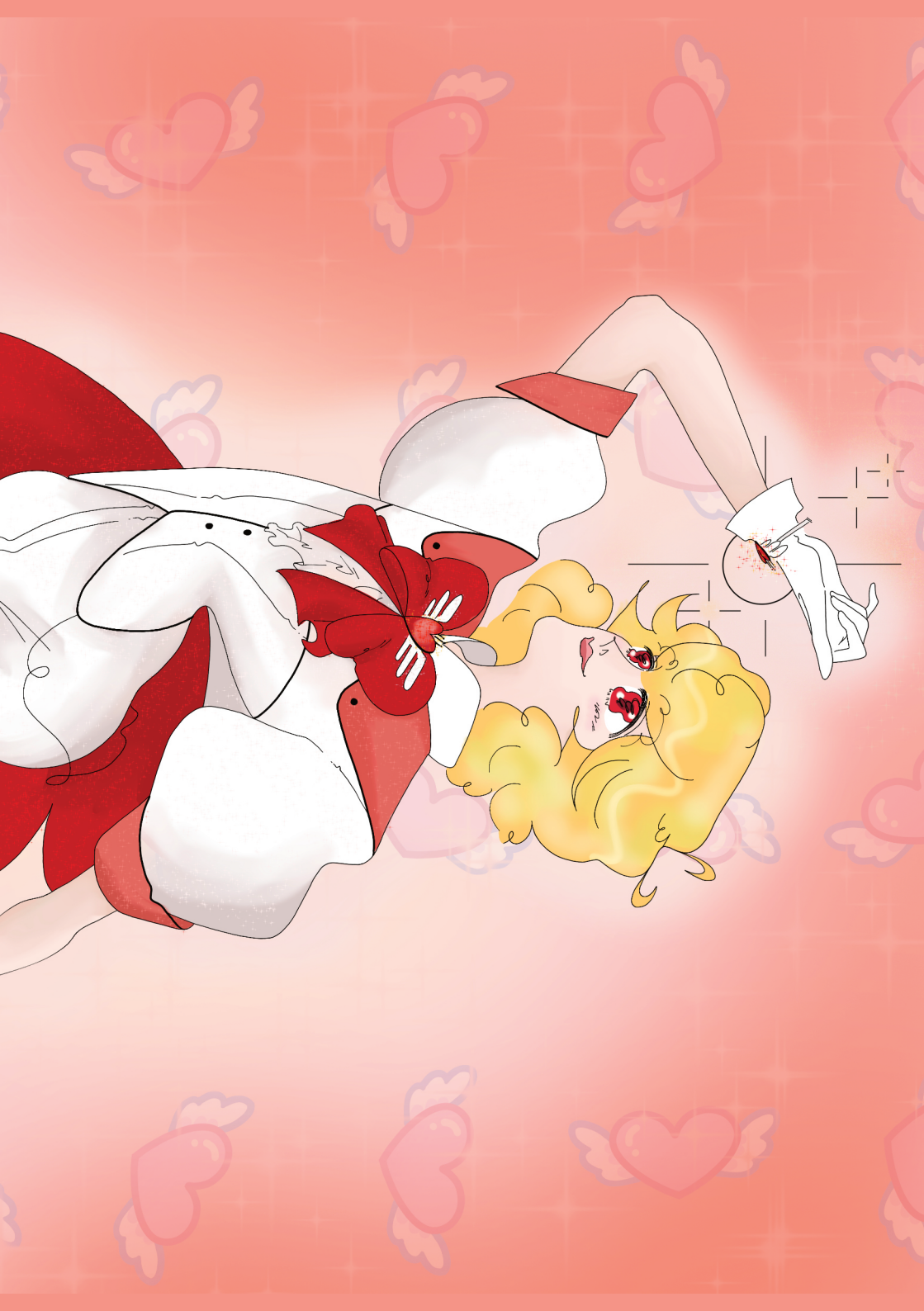
For a moment Io was reminded of warm brown

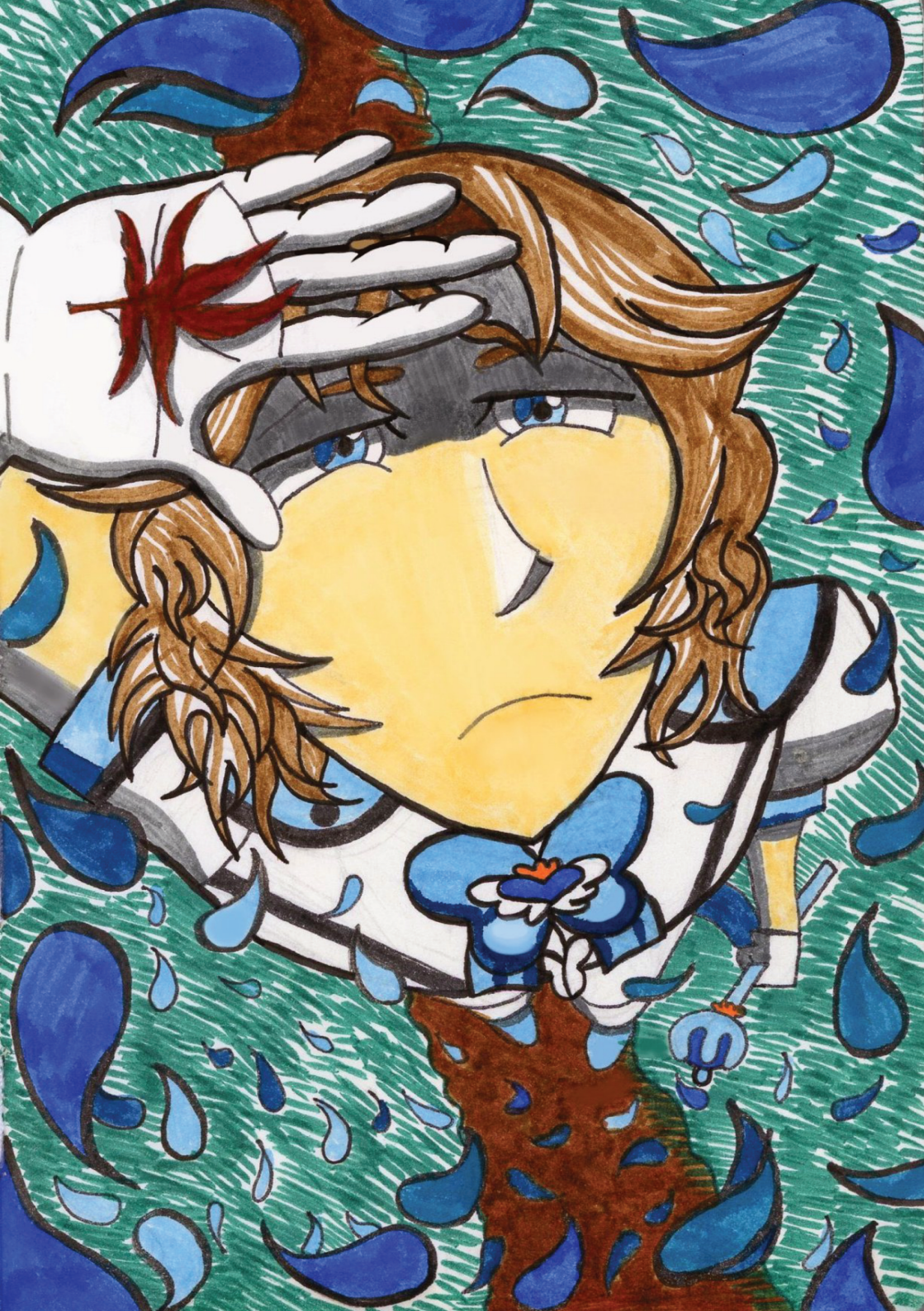
eyes and a glass raised. *Are you lonely?* A poster couldn't compare to the real deal. "You've got bags under your eyes, you didn't go to bed when I told you too."

"Ah yes," Ryuu grinned, stepping closer into Io's space. Bold as always "I totally missed your gentle opinions on my life choices."

"Good." Io swallowed, suddenly becoming aware of something new. Something that wasn't as apparent before Ryuu had left for the US. He had to lower his gaze to meet his friend's eyes. Io felt himself smirking. "You shrunk."

The outraged look on Ryuu's face only made that warm feeling in Io's chest intensify. Ryuu came back, yet somehow Io knew this was what coming home actually felt like.





I am afraid of what I'm risking if I follow you

Into the Unknown

Adri

"HEY!" The blonde boy yelled as he threw open the door to the men's bath, Yumoto froze as he saw Wombat and...a lemur in the bath, he blinked slowly, "Wombat...?" He dropped the broom he was holding. "What are you doing here?"

"I am here for one thing, we need all the Defense Club together right now and I can explain!" The pink alien cried and Yumoto looked at them, "Um well...I can't get them right now."

"Why? This is very important!"

"It's very complicated." Yumoto spoke quickly as he and Wombat frowned, "Yumoto, please, the world is at stake and—"

"I can hear you, but I'm going to ignore you until later."

"Wait!" Wombat cried and Yumoto turned around as Wombat and the lemur followed him, "I'm not asking for any trouble!"

"Nope, I'm going to keep going about my day."

"But why, you're not even telling me what's wrong..." Wombat grumbled and Yumoto walked to the front of the Kurotama where the customers would be greeted.

Gora stood there at the podium and looked at Wombat, "Oh." The older Hakone spoke, "Welcome back, I didn't think you would be coming back...ever." He almost had a suspicious look on his face, but Wombat didn't seem to really notice it.

"Gora, Yumoto won't tell me what's wrong!" Wombat whispered to Gora, "I just need to get him and the others together because—!"

"I can hear you whispering, Wombat!" Yumoto called from the other side of the room, "Stop putting your nose in where it doesn't belong!"

Wombat groaned and the lemur on his head sighed.

"Yumoto!" Wombat cried, "Come on, I'm just asking you for one thing!"

"You're just a voice in my ear, I don't hear you!" Yumoto sang as he walked past Wombat into his room and Wombat grumbled, "Yumoto Hakone! You better listen to me!"

"Nope! All my friends aren't here and to be honest—" He stopped himself from speaking and threw himself onto his futon. "Everyone I've loved hasn't come in for a while." he mumbled into a pillow and Wombat frowned, seemingly not hearing what he had just said, "Yumoto, there's a new adven—"

"Nope, I've had my adventures and I really

don't want another one after I almost was killed twice now."

"Really?"

"Yep. So, not going."

"You would have jumped at the chance before Yufuin and Kinugawa graduated!"

"Yeah, that was before so, nope, sorry. Not going to help."

"Are you afraid?" Wombat asked slowly, "Afraid of what will happen if you help me again?"

"Maybe."

Wombat sighed and shook his head. "I don't understand you! What happened to my Sparkling Prince and being fearless!?"

"Going into the unknown is scary." Yumoto mumbled, "Sure, when they graduated I would have done it. Now, it's all different." He sighed as he sat up and looked right at Wombat with a look of some sadness...almost some anger in those scarlet eyes. A look that he rarely gave to anyone. The alien almost wondered if he still felt some betrayal in him leaving after the third years had graduated.

Wombat looked at him in pure disbelief, his eyes widening slightly as he had never heard Yumoto just give up so easily, "You're afraid of the risks? You? The one who kicked Hireashi's butt and then Zundar and Dadacha's?"

"I'm just afraid of following you into

certain doom again. You let my brother get turned into a monster—" Wombat made a noise of displeasure while Yumoto continued, "let my brother get kidnapped, let me almost get killed by two brothers who were jealous, and then you yelled at me when I felt the same way as the monster."

"I don't need anything new." Yumoto groaned as he turned away from the creature. "I am perfectly fine without being a Battle Lover!"

The alien groaned as well, "Yumoto, you're the best of the Battle Lovers! You can't just quit! You would never let someone be a monster or get hurt." "Again," Yumoto groaned into his pillow, "that was before and this is now."

"Fine." Wombat huffed and went to the door, "When you want to actually take it seriously, I'll come back."

Yumoto sat there in silence...he didn't know what to think as Wombat left his room, most likely to talk with Gora or something to figure out what was wrong.

Night went on and soon Yumoto was back in his room trying to sleep...he couldn't at all, his mind was racing with what had occurred earlier that day. His scarlet eyes snapped open as he heard his phone go off. He sat up in his futon

quickly and turned as he saw that the alien was scrolling on his phone, "What do you want...? You've been keeping me awake..." he huffed "Or are you just here to distract me so I can make another big mistake...?"

Wombat sighed and looked at him, "I see... you've been texting them and..." "Yeah, only En and Atsushi reply." Yumoto sighed, "Io and Ryuu rarely text back. Io hasn't since he graduated..."

"Leaving you alone..." Wombat concluded as he put Yumoto's phone down and turned to the boy as he held the scarlet phone out to him, "You know, you should have changed your passcode, it's still the same as before."

Yumoto laughed softly as he grabbed his phone from Wombat, "Yeah...some things never change."

Wombat looked out the window and ran to it as he turned back to the boy, "So, what are you thinking?"

"I wonder...if...there are more out there, a little bit like us, do more people fight in the name of love? Or...maybe this isn't where I'm currently meant to be." Yumoto replied as he slowly untangled himself from his futon and sighed.

He walked up to the window with Wombat and threw the window open. "Every day is always harder...without them near me and..." Yumoto slid his hands up his face, "the power of love grows stronger every day. Is what you'd say."

He laughed in a slightly bitter tone and Wombat smiled softly. "Exactly, what I'd say."

"So, who was that purple guy with you? Is he your kid?" the blonde boy asked and Wombat replied, "His name is Ai-Ai..." "Love-Love?" Yumoto replied as Wombat shrugged, "Where is he now?"

"Not sure."

"Oh." He replied and looked up at the moon in the sky as he took in the cool, slightly damp nightly air. "Okay...maybe, I do...want to follow you again." Yumoto sighed softly as he spoke slowly, "I do miss being a hero. I miss my friends and I miss the feeling of helping others besides helping them here."

"Yumoto..."

"I mean it, I'll follow you. I'll take another adventure, Battle Lover Scarlet is back." He smiled brightly.

Wombat missed that angelic smile...he always knew Yumoto was powerful in his own right, his angelic face always carrying the others to certain victory.

Yumoto looked down as Wombat suddenly climbed onto the roof that was outside the open window. "What is it? Is there someone you sense or is something else going on? You didn't really do this before...unless..." he whispered and Wombat turned to him, "Something big is out there and we have to stop it. You and the others are needed right away." The

alien turned from Yumoto and the bathhouse and looked up as he darted off.

"Wait!" Yumoto cried out and scrambled downstairs, still dressed in his scarlet pajamas, slipping his shoes on quickly. He spotted Wombat running towards the long staircase and gasped. "Come back!"

The younger boy ran outside the Kurotama, quickly transforming into Battle Lover Scarlet once more for the first time in nearly two years, chasing after Wombat. "Can you show me?! I told you I want to go with you!"

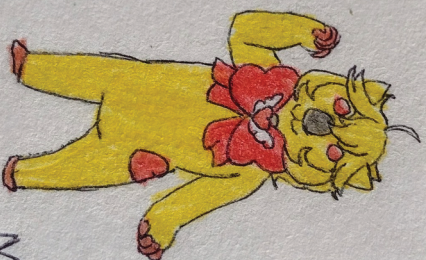
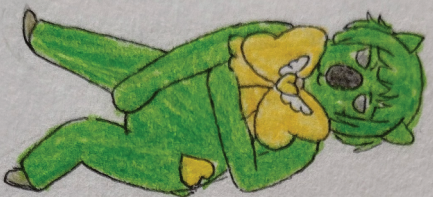
He frowned as Wombat ran faster towards Binan High School, "Where are you going!? Don't leave me alone!" The boy cried out as he chased after Wombat up the stairs, the same stairs that he walked up daily, "How can I follow you, if you keep running into the unknown!?" he cried and threw out his hand as he ran to the top of the stairs to try to catch him. He froze as he heard Gora's voice and Wombat standing at the top.

Both calling his name.

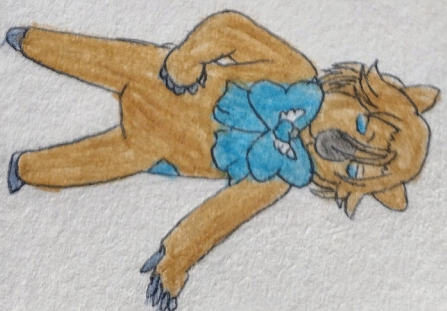
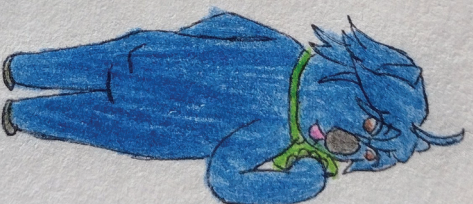
"Yumoto!"







Mercy S.





Mercy S.



Mercy S.



Blooming Maids

Serenity

Author's Note: This was originally gonna be an actual full fic. But due to me catching a really bad cold right around the time the Zine deadline was coming around, this ended up being simply a decently-sized preview. It is missing the actual introduction scene, and cuts off before you see the Monster of The Week in monster form. Once it is completed, you can read it on either AO3 (username: SoullessSerenity), Dreamwidth or my Neocities site.

This is a one-shot set in the middle of a sort of "fan season" of mine, which I call 'Boueibu Bloom'. I've been meaning to make a proper 12-chapter fic for it for ages, so I thought the Zine was a perfect excuse to at the very least do something with these characters!



The Student Council had been in its usual calmness that afternoon. The three members, Kazuki, Hiroshi and Minoru, were sorting through and discussing the Culture Festival proposals from other clubs, seeing what they could help with and what was a bit too complicated.

Much to Minoru's dismay, that calmness was blown when Kazuki suddenly squealed with a wide smile as he grabbed the next club's idea.

"Alright, alright, what is the Earth Defense Club asking for?" Hiroshi asked with a gentle smile.

"How do you know it's them?" Kazuki asked.

"No other club would have you reacting like *this*." Hiroshi giggled.

Minoru was nowhere as happy or calm as the other two. Just the mere mention of that club made his blood boil and he couldn't help but furrow his eyebrows.

"They wanna do a maid café!" Kazuki almost jumped off his desk chair in joy as he showed the paper to Hiroshi.

Minoru instantly started choking on nothing. "What!?"

"Hm... Seems they can get the maid dresses on their own, but they are gonna need some equipment and more space to operate than just the clubroom." Hiroshi said as he thoughtfully read the paper.

"Do they have no shame? They are gonna be the

laughing stock of the whole school." Minoru mumbled through gritted teeth.

"Hm? I think it might be fun! They'd look so cute in maid costumes too!" Kazuki brought his hands to his own cheeks as he smiled like an idiot. Both Minoru and Hiroshi knew fully well he was more excited about one member than the others.

"The costumes are a fun idea, but I'm excited about the food too! It's been a while since I last ate anything Kouki cooked." Hiroshi said with a sort of nostalgic smile.

Seeing that smile made Minoru feel even worse... For a reason he couldn't quite pinpoint. But something about him being so happy about an old friend just... Made him angry...

Kazuki and Hiroshi kept the actual discussion going mostly by themselves, as Minoru was too upset to actually say anything productive to the subject. He was biting his lip as he tried to not say anything. He never understood why those two were always so friendly with such a pointless club, aside from Hiroshi being childhood friends with one of them and Kazuki's weird obsession with knowing more about Yuma. But shouldn't the Student Council not let itself be so easily swayed by those personal things?

Though... He didn't exactly leave personal things at the door before entering the Student Council's Office either...

Although he didn't pay much attention to what

the two were saying, he managed to get the gist of it. There was a decently big available area at the courtyard that the Earth Defense Club could use without having any hiccups involving crowds, as well as a handful of cooking equipment they could take there. Overall, it'd go over without a hitch. Minoru had been hoping it would be too complicated to set up, but he couldn't really do anything about that...

"The Culture Festival..." A deep voice spoke from a corner of the room, and the three boys looked over. Aster, the big, light orange, bear-like creature they had run into a few months ago, was sitting in that corner while eating a bag of fish-shaped snacks. "It could be a good opportunity to look for unhappy or dissatisfied people."

Kazuki clapped his hands together with a smile. "You're right! We'll have to keep our eyes peeled!"

Minoru nodded quietly. Maybe looking for people to turn into monsters would at least help him feel a bit less angry on the day of the Culture Festival, or at least work as an excuse for him to not go near the Earth Defense Club's café.



A few weeks passed, and the Culture Festival had arrived in the blink of an eye.

Despite the rushed decision, the Earth Defense Club had gotten the initial preparations ready without much trouble. Aoi and Jun had gotten the maid costumes ready without any trouble, and the Student Council had managed to get them one working oven and two microwaves in their stand.

As the five boys carried their cooking ingredients towards the stand, Isamu noticed Yuma frowning a bit at how many tables were set up in the courtyard.

"Getting nervous already?" Isamu asked.

Yuma almost jumped, taken back by Isamu suddenly talking to him. He looked down and his shoulders raised, as if making himself smaller would make his nervousness any better.

"If you don't want to be here, we won't judge you." Aoi said with a soft smile, slowing his pace so he was walking side-by-side with Yuma now. "Or you could just do the cooking part and not do anything that involves talking to customers directly!"

Yuma quietly shook his head. Even though he still seemed very nervous, the other members of the club knew him long enough by now to know that meant he was gonna try to endure it a bit.

"Well, if you change your mind later, or if someone is mean to you for being too quiet, we've got your back." Aoi said as they arrived

at their stand and started putting down the ingredient boxes.

"You guys should go ahead and get changed." Kouki said as he poked the buttons on one of the microwaves. "Me and Jun will make sure the equipment is working and get the ingredients organized. It's faster that way."

"Okey~!" Aoi hopped in place in response.

Jun opened the box that the maid dresses were in, and searched for the three required dresses. It wasn't hard to tell which dress was whose, since they had decided to color-code them after their magical forms. He handed the red one to Yuma, the blue one to Isamu, and the green one to Aoi.

"Wait, now that I think about it... Has anyone seen Tiga today?" Jun asked as he handed over Aoi's dress.

"We lost track of him *again*?" Isamu asked.

"I'm here!" Tiga yelled as he hopped out of Kouki's bag. The small lilac creature, who looked like a cute tiger plushie, stood on top of one of the microwaves and put his little paws to his hips. "I wanna do something to help too!"

Kouki sighed and rolled his eyes. "We already told you it's too risky to have you help out! Whatever we have you do, *someone* is gonna notice you eventually."

Tiga chuckled. "That's because I haven't shown you guys my new trick yet!"

All of the five boys looked at him in confusion. Tiga jumped off the microwave and, as he was in the air, he was engulfed in light. His silhouette had grown bigger right in front of their eyes, similar to how it happened when he changed to be more like a real tiger. However, this time his silhouette looked nothing like a tiger's.

The light around his body disappeared and, to everyone's shock, he now looked like a small human boy.

He looked like a kid. His skin was light brown, the same shade as Jun's, all over his body except for his cheeks, where he had two lighter-skinned marks that resembled a tiger's stripes. His hair was long and lilac, tied into a braid over his shoulder that reached the top of his stomach. And surprisingly, he was wearing a little lilac maid dress himself that reached just beneath his knees. He had a pair of white thigh-high socks and, just like the costumes for the other boys, a pair of cute little black shoes with a bow the same color as his dress.

"What the... Since when can you do that!?" Isamu asked.

Tiga laughed proudly. "Ever since the last monster you purified! I did say I absorb some of the power from the purified seeds they leave behind, didn't I? I was tired after the last battle because my body was getting used to being able to do this!"

"You still stand out like a sore thumb, though." Kouki said. "This is a high school. You look like you'd be in middle school *at most*."

"But I wanna help!" Tiga whined at first, then looked down at his feet. "You guys have done so much to help *me*... With the amount of power I've absorbed, this is as big as I can get in this form..."

"Aw, come on, he's adorable! I'm sure there's *something* we can find for him to do!" Jun said with a smile as he squished Tiga's cheeks. "Hm... What if we have him hand out the flyers we made? It'd leave us with more people to handle the cooking and serving compared to having us alternate the flyer duty."

"That doesn't solve the issue of him looking like a kid, though. Someone is gonna ask where the fuck he came from." Isamu said.

Jun looked down at Tiga worried. That was indeed a more complicated problem. "We could say he's my little cousin who *really* insisted on helping out?"

Aoi tilted his head in thought. "That *might* work? Most of the teachers are pretty chill."

Kouki sighed once again. He picked up the pile of flyers from his bag, and handed them to Tiga. "Fine, go give these out and then go back once you are finished. If anyone asks, you are Jun's cousin. And if they find *that* to be too bullshit

of an explanation, go hide somewhere, turn small again and rush back here right after."

Tiga smiled from ear to ear as he tightly held onto the flyers. He saluted with one hand, still smiling like an oddly proud kid. "I'll do my best!" He turned around and rushed away, still careful not to let any of the flyers slip from his hands.

"Is he really gonna be okay?" Issamu asked, looking genuinely worried. "What kind of kid would be excited to help with a *maid café*, of all things?"

Yuma seemed worried as well, perhaps more than any of the other boys. Then again, he was always prone to worrying about everything more than them. Sometime in the middle of the discussion, he had started to nervously scratch at the back of one of his hands, and the skin there had turned a bit red.

Noticing that, Isamu placed a hand on Yuma's shoulder. "Anyway, let's go get changed. The faster we do that, the better."

With a nod of agreement from everyone, Yuma, Isamu and Aoi went to the bathrooms to get changed. And then quickly headed back to the stand so Kouki and Jun could also get changed without leaving anything unattended.

Yuma's red maid outfit had the longest skirt out of all of them, the material reaching just below his knees, and he wore white thigh-high socks. Isamu's blue dress, surprisingly, had the

shortest skirt at roughly halfway through his thighs. His socks were fairly short, leaving most of his legs exposed. Aoi's green dress had its skirt at knee length, just like Jun's and Kouki's skirts. And aside from wearing a white pantyhose, Aoi also wore a set of white arm warmers. Jun wore a pair of white socks that reached just below his knees, and Kouki wore white socks that reached above his knees.

Kouki and Jun had left a few things in the oven and microwaves getting ready ahead of time just in case. Thankfully, most of those things needed enough time to get ready that Yuma, Isamu and Aoi didn't have to worry about making mistakes while they were gone.

Even though the two of them had taken a while longer to get back, apparently due to Jun getting confused when trying to put the dress on, they still got back quick enough that no customers had showed up yet.

For a good while at first, they hadn't gotten much interest. Every now and then, a few students would walk by, glance at them and clearly snicker at their outfits. But they'd quickly go pale and walk away at a single glare from Isamu.

Eventually, a pair of students, a taller black-haired one and a shorter brown-haired one, walked up to them and actually seemed interested. They looked over the menu together. Aoi

quickly pulled out a notepad and prepared to write anything down.

"I want orange juice and a piece of chocolate cake!" Said the taller one. Aoi nodded with a smile and wrote it down.

The shorter boy raised an eyebrow at something in the menu. "What is this thing at the end of the 'snacks' section? Pa... Pawn..."

"It's 'pão de queijo'." Jun said, walking up to the boys. "It's a Brazilian snack. It literally means 'cheese bread', and that's essentially what it is. Some people think it smells weird, but it's really yummy!"

"Hmm... I'll give it a try, then. One of that and a can of cola soda."

The pair took a seat at one of the nearest tables as Kouki and Jun got their order ready. The thing that took the longest to get ready was the 'pão de queijo', as the ones they had started preparing still needed a few minutes to get ready.

Once everything was ready, Aoi took everything over to the pair's table. "Your order is here, masters~!" Aoi said with a smile as he set everything down. "Just be careful, it's hot!"

The boys politely thanked him, and thus he turned around and returned to waiting. Kouki went back to grinding at his rhythm game, Isamu was talking to Yuma (though, Yuma was always just responding with nods or shakes of head or

with facial expressions and body gestures). Aoi had thought of chatting with Jun as he waited, but he seemed oddly focused on their pair of customers a few meters away.

Aoi giggled. Jun could be pretty serious about his cooking. A seriousness he didn't usually dedicate to other topics.

After a few enough minutes of waiting, the food had already cooled down enough to be more edible. It did help that the shorter boy had been smart enough to open a little tear on the foreign snack ahead of time for it to cool down a little faster.

When the boy gave it a bite, Jun leaned forward so much that Aoi almost thought he was gonna fall over to the other side of the stand.

Although they couldn't hear the pair's conversation from where they stood, they could see him smiling as he swallowed that first bite. And they saw him holding it out in front of him for the other boy to bite. (Aoi couldn't help but think how cute the action was.) The taller boy also seemed to enjoy it.

Satisfied, Jun stepped back and turned around with a proud smile. Aoi giggled again, and that seemed to finally make Jun realize he was there. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing. I just think you are really cute when you're serious like this." Aoi said with a smile and a shrug.

For the next 2 or so hours, they hadn't seen all that many people come to them. It was to be expected, given it wasn't quite lunch time yet. A specific group of boys who did come by had mentioned that the first pair they served had said the food was good. (Hearing that had made Jun smile so much that his cheeks had turned red from the straining.) If the order came from someone who looked more chill, Yuma offered to take and deliver their order. Jun and Kouki were still doing the cooking, and Isamu would help in either the kitchen or with the orders as he was needed.

However, as they got closer to lunch time, the amount of people started to get a bit overwhelming. They had stocked up a lot of ingredients just in case, but taking care of people's orders was starting to get hard. Isamu was constantly on the move between the kitchen and the serving and, despite his nervousness, Yuma was trying his best to help with as many orders as possible.

There was so much to keep up with that the other members didn't have the opportunity to check in on Yuma very often. He had turned a bit pale from the nervousness, the most color on his skin being how he was blushing from a few people calling his quietness cute. He didn't necessarily mind being called cute, but... The attention made him a bit nervous...

"Is everything alright, Iiyama-kun?" A famil-

iar voice asked behind him, making him jump with a muffled close-mouthed yelp.

He turned around and saw exactly who he had expected to see: Asama Kazuki. The Student Council President. Minoru and Hiroshi were not too far behind him.

Instinctively, Yuma rushed back towards the stand. Jun and Kouki noticed that something about the way he ran was a bit different from his usual back-and-forth to serve the customers.

"Do you need a break, Yuma-senpai?" Jun asked. Right as he and Kouki turned to check on him, they saw the Student Council not too far behind. "Good afternoon! Are you guys gonna want something?"

"Good afternoon!" Kazuki said with a cheerful smile. "You guys sure have your hands full, huh? I can see business is booming!"

"It's a bit hard to keep up, but we're managing. I hadn't expected this many people to show up." Kouki said. Quietly, he gave Hiroshi a small smile as a greeting. Hiroshi returned a much wider smile.

Kazuki glanced over to Yuma again, who was in the process of gulping down half a bottle of water. He was still a bit pale, and also seemed to be trembling just slightly. Kazuki frowned... He hated seeing any of Binan's students suffering but, for some reason he couldn't quite pinpoint, he hated seeing Yuma suffering even more.

"Do you guys need any help?" He said. "I'm not busy at the moment, and I'd be more than happy to give a hand!"

"Huh!?" Jun, Kouki and Minoru said at the same time. Yuma turned his face towards him just enough to see him through his peripheral vision.

"Are you sure? Isn't it gonna look like the Student Council is favoring us a bit too much?" Kouki asked.

Kazuki smiled. "It's just for a little bit! Just until the lunch rush is over."

Hiroshi shrugged. "I don't mind helping out either. Plus, it seems kinda fun."

"Absolutely not!" Minoru protested, glaring at Kazuki. "I'd rather die than be caught being buddy-buddy with these people!"

Kazuki sighed. "Why are you always like this, Minoru-kun? If you don't want to do it, you can go on ahead without us. But that attitude of yours is starting to get worrisome..."

"Well-" Minoru started to talk, but was interrupted by someone behind him speaking up, the sound making him turn around.

"You heard Asama-kaichou. If you hate us so much then get lost already." Isamu said with a glare as he crossed his arms.

For a moment, Minoru and Isamu both just glared at each other. While Isamu just seemed serious and stone-cold, Minoru looked like he

was about to lose it as his face contorted and he gritted his teeth.

Finally, Minoru scoffed. "Fine! Tell me when you two are done here." He started to walk away, not even glancing back at them.

Kazuki politely bowed to Isamu. "I deeply apologize for Minoru-kun's behavior."

Isamu dismissed Kazuki's concerns with a wave of his hand, but still smiled at him. "Don't worry. That guy has always had a short temper." He picked up a tray with the next order he needed to deliver, ignoring the way Kazuki tilted his head in curiosity at his response.

"If you guys wanna wear maid dresses, we actually got a set of spare ones made just in case something went wrong with these two!" Jun said, carrying one of their cardboard boxes in his arms as he approached Kazuki and Hiroshi. "They're just copies of the one's we're all wearing, but you should be able to find ones that fit you."

"Oh? Too bad I'm so much taller than Kouki. It would have been nice if we could match." Hiroshi pouted, then smiled and winked in Kouki's direction.

Kouki rolled his eyes, but also gave him a genuine smile in return.

"Isamu's might fit you! As for Kaichou... Yuma's might work?" Jun held up a hand to his forehead to compare his and Kazuki's heights. He seemed

to be at most a few centimeters taller than Yuma.

"We'll only know if we try!" Kazuki took the red maid dress from the box with an obvious wide smile on his face.



Tiga had been handing out flyers all around the school. Given it was lunch time, he doubted there would still be all that many people that weren't already at the area with the food stands. But he still had a few flyers left, so he wanted to at least finish handing them out.

He had made it to the school's greenhouse, handing flyers to every student and visitor he ran into. He was left with a single flyer in his hands.

He looked around, trying to find any person that he hadn't run into yet.

At a corner of the garden, he found a big, muscular student crouched by one of the flower patches. It was hard to see what he was doing.

Smiling, Tiga hopped towards him. "Excuse me!"

The big guy almost jumped as he heard him. Although he quickly hid his phone, Tiga still managed to see that he had been attempting to take a picture of a butterfly that had been among the flowers, which quickly flew away when the boy got startled.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you!" Tiga said with a frown. "I just wanted to give you this! Please come to our maid café!" He handed the boy his last flyer, which he hesitantly accepted with a slight tint of pink on his cheeks. "Thank you for your time! And sorry again!" Tiga smiled as he quickly turned around and rushed towards the greenhouse's exit.

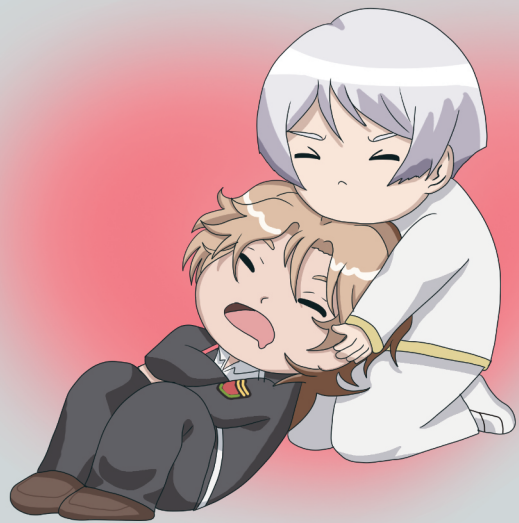
He hadn't thought to stick around to watch the boy's reaction before leaving. If he had, he would have seen the boy sigh as he ran his hand over his sweaty forehead and slicked back black hair. He'd have seen his lips tremble as he looked at the pink and cute flyer, and seen him look back at the flower patch, then at his phone and sigh when realizing his photo of the butterfly came out blurry.

He would have seen an unknown person, who looked oddly similar to Minoru, approach him with a smirk. "Kawai Daisuke, correct?"

The boy, Daisuke, froze in place and quickly hid both his phone and the flyer.

"Wilted Daisy, pleased to meet you." The unknown person raised his hand. "Why don't you tell me what's troubling you?"

With a snap of his fingers, Daisuke was suddenly hit with a strange, strangling pain. He groaned as it looked like plant roots spread through his body from his chest...



A Watsonian Analysis of the Music in Boueibu

Erika

For the reason behind why something is the way it is in fiction, there are two lenses to look through that can provide an explanation. These are the Doylist and Watsonian views, named for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the *Sherlock Holmes* series, and Dr. John Watson, Sherlock Holmes' companion in the stories. When using the Doylist view, the audience turns to the author or creator of the work, and determines that things are the way they are because that's how the author wanted it. On the other hand, when the Watsonian view is used, it is to give an in-universe explanation for why something happens in the story.

When it comes to the music-opening and ending credits, character songs, and duet songs—in the *Boueibu* franchise, the Doylist view is obvious, in that these songs are being used to give more insight into the characters' backgrounds, and are additional

merchandise for fans. The Watsonian view, however, is where things get interesting.

As a quick summary, the Watsonian view for these songs is they exist in some form in-universe. The album art for certain CDs lends itself to this concept, as the characters are shown participating in karaoke. However, there are some CDs, mainly from *HAPPY KISS*, that feel more like staged photos specifically for a CD's release, and not a peek at a scene that happened outside of what was seen in the anime proper. In addition, during the OVA there are montages of recycled footage placed over the character songs, and while the characters acknowledge that *something* is happening during their allotted time, it is unknown if they are singing their songs in these moments. This essay will start with the CDs that have karaoke covers, before delving into a Watsonian reason for why most CDs do not have a karaoke scene for their artwork.

The first CD to feature karaoke art was the Earth Defense Club's character songs CD from the first season, *Battle Lovers SONGS Love Shower!* In a warmly lit room, two wired microphones are present, in the hands of En

and Ryuu. In the background, it appears En is currently in the middle of his song, while in the foreground, Ryuu is teasingly playing keep-away with Yumoto, who is reaching for the microphone. In the middle ground, Io looks on in concern, and Atsushi looks up at En while holding a maraca that matches En's.

The first track is Yumoto's, *1, 2, 3, Love & Joy*. It has mentions of being a superhero, love, cuddling, and rice balls. It is a very Yumoto song, as the latter two items on the list are his favorite things. However, being a superhero and utilizing the power of love go hand-in-hand with the magical girl genre, as *Boueibu* is parodying. Because the song does not include mention of the Battle Lovers or anything specific to the anime proper, the song could exist in-universe as the opening credits for a magical girl anime. In addition, an instrumental version is used diegetically in the second season's Christmas episode, confirming this is an actual song in the universe with a physical release.

The second track is En's, *I am the Ultimate Procrastination Advocate!!* Again,

the lyrics reflect En's outlook on life, with references to his love of onsen manju, relaxing in a clubroom, and going to the hot spring, as well being forced to take on the role of a superhero. Yet again, the Battle Lovers are not mentioned by name. A rock song about being lazy hearkens back to childhood memories of another song about being lazy, and that is Relient K's rock cover of *The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything* from *Veggie Tales*. It's easy to imagine En growing up, watching a show about lazy superheroes, and years later finding a rock cover of the theme song to sing for karaoke.

Now in the halfway point of this CD is Atsushi's song, *Why So Cool?* This song gives insight into why he would act the way he does when it comes to not confronting Kinshirou, and by extension his passivity when he and En are turned against each other in the first season. The intro's instrumental sounds a bit similar to the Jonas Brothers' cover of *Poor Unfortunate Souls* from *The Little Mermaid*, but in-universe it could be from a pop-punk band in the same vein as early Paramore.

Next is Io's song, *Naruko's Class* "Equations to Earn on the Stock Market." This one gets a bit difficult with its Watsonian analysis, as it is about his hobby (investing in stocks) and has his surname in the title. However, *Boueibu* has comedic logic in its universe, as with situations like a principal hiring a ballet instructor instead of a volleyball coach out of confusion, as well as the monthly Pretty Boy competitions. Therefore, the explanation behind this song could be an inside joke within the Defense Club—perhaps one day, everyone was searching up their names online, and they found someone who shared Io's surname had released a song years ago that fits his personality to a T. Or perhaps Io invested in something, and in exchange he was gifted a song and he couldn't refuse the offer. Alternatively, Io could have commissioned a song—which doesn't seem likely—or is singing his own lyrics over a different song to teach a lesson on how to earn money from the stock market. It's entirely possible for him to be teaching a night class on the topic as a side hustle, as it was established in the second season that he has a real estate broker's license.

Finally, there's Ryuu's song *Baby Baby Sweet Baby!!* Like Io's, his song also delves into his hobby (doting on girls), and in addition has a hint of it being personalized with mentions of cherries (his favorite food), being a hero, the power of love, and the element of fire. However, these are general enough that it could pass as a regular pop song in-universe. In addition, there are two possibilities for who the original singer could be. It could be a guy singing about being a ladies' man, or it could be a girl singing about guys and Ryuu decided to change some pronouns and words around to make it about girls—like a coward.

The second CD to feature karaoke art was the Earth Conquest Club's character songs CD from the first season, *Caerula Adamas Conquest!* This time, the room is dark, lit only by a disco ball. Two wired microphones are once again present, in the possession of Akoya, who is singing in the foreground, and Kinshirou, waiting his turn in the background. Ibushi has a placating hand on Kinshirou's shoulder. In hindsight, this album cover contradicts what Kinshirou says in the second season's finale, that the

council does not sing, though it may be that he doesn't want to be the source of the universe's entertainment like in the first season, unaware that a picture was taken for this album cover.

The first track is Kinshirou's *Never Know*. It mirrors Atsushi's song, in that it showcases his emotions and point-of-view during the first season, though it doesn't name-drop any specific plot points like curry, world domination, or Caerula Adamas. The song's lyrics are far-removed enough from the anime to fit into the "breakup song" mold of pop songs, though Kinshirou would most likely deny it.

Then, it's Ibushi's *Butler's Philosophy*. This song doesn't go into the plot of the anime, and instead delves into Ibushi's thoughts towards Kinshirou and how far he would go to serve him. This level of devotion, paired with his power over chains, gives almost a hint of masochism—perhaps a version of the song was used as a tie-in for an in-universe movie similar to *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

The final track is Akoya's song, *Beauty... EGOISM*. This song is from the perspective of

someone who thinks they're superior due to their beauty, which fits in with Akoya's character. In addition, the lyrics liken the beauty to being an evil power that will be used to bring order, mirroring Akoya's motivation for being a member of Caerula Adamas. However, there are no specifics to the anime's plot or his being bullied as a child, which was revealed in the manga. Therefore, this could be a villain song from a children's movie, similar to Yzma's cut song *Snuff Out the Light* from *The Emperor's New Groove*.

Now, onto the first season's duet songs from the CD *Earth Defense Club DUET SONGS LOVE Making!* While the background doesn't place the characters in a room and instead has screen-tone circles with a rainbow gradient, all six characters are holding wired microphones, appearing to match the two in the solos CD. It is entirely possible that the location the Defense Club goes to has a green screen that they're posing in front of.

The first track is Yumoto and Gora's duet, *Oh My An-chan♡*. This one has Gora repeatedly saying Yumoto's name, as well as other

direct references to the anime. However, it is entirely possible that it is a song about someone loving their older brother, but Yumoto and Gora personalize it when singing. This leads to the audience being presented with the brothers' version of the lyrics—changing out the names used—instead of the original version.

The second track is Io and Ryuu's duet, *Sync a Think*. The lyrics describe two friends meeting, the connection between them, and looking to the future. There is no mention of money (aside from "a string of digits"), girls, or the Battle Lovers. The song wouldn't be out of place alongside other songs used for teen movies from the 2000's, such as *Dancing With Myself* in the end credits of *Mean Girls*.

Finally, there is En and Atsushi's duet, *Intersection of Calming Wind*. Like Io and Ryuu's duet, the lyrics describe friendship, without there being anything exclusive to the characters or the show—meaningless conversations, climbing stairs, and having a fight one day aren't specific to En and Atsushi. This song, like Io and Ryuu's, could also be a song that came from a movie.

Moving on to the Defense Club's character songs from the second season, it features the boys at a table with refreshments. Io is standing in the foreground, singing into a wireless microphone. In the middle ground, Ryuu is recording him on his phone, and on the opposite side of the table, Yumoto is eating noodles with Wombat on his back. In the background, En and Atsushi are huddled over a tablet, looking at the song selection for karaoke.

The first track for this CD is Ryuu's song, *WORLD WIDE LOVE LEADER*. This song includes his surname (Zaou), as well as references to being a Battle Lover, specifically his title as the "Thrilling Prince." Like the arguments for previous songs that had specifics, the options for the song existing in-universe could be Ryuu changed the lyrics for karaoke—meaning the original version that exists has the same instrumental but different words—or it could be coincidence. However, in this case it wouldn't be a *pure* coincidence, as the Battle Lovers are established in the world. Someone—either at the school who was witness to the identity reveal at the end of the first season, or an

alien on the production team for the reality show—may have written a song from the perspective of Battle Lover Vesta, and Ryuu somehow found it in the circulation of karaoke songs. This seems less likely than him changing the lyrics, though.

The second track is Io's song, *Feel it!* This song's title and lyrics are not as specific as his first season's character song. There is mention of a tablet and calculations, the setting is a clubroom, and it's implied he's singing about Ryuu. However, there is nothing in the song that stands out as it having to specifically be Io's perspective singing.

At the halfway point, there's Atsushi's song *Running Round and Round in Circles EVERYDAY!!* On the first listen, it seems this song immediately crushes the idea that it could exist in-universe, as the lyrics list the other members of the Defense Club by name, as well as their hobbies. It is from Atsushi's perspective as he goes about his day, trying to wrangle everyone as the mom friend. However, the tune sounds like it would come out from a kids' series—a drastic change from his song from the first season.

Therefore, it's possible this could be another case of changing the lyrics to make it an inside joke among friends.

The penultimate track is En's *The Bath is the Ultimate Paradise Facility!!* In a universe where a school has monthly Pretty Boy competitions, it's not too strange for there to be a song entirely about baths. To some extent, the inclusion of art (Duchamp's *Fountain*), history (baths existing since 4000 BC), and science (H₂O) facts makes it fit in with the discography of They Might Be Giants.

Finally, Yumoto's song on the CD is *I Can't Express My Thanks Enough*. The lyrics are about him thanking his older brother and the other members of the Defense Club for being there for him. However, this could easily be another case of swapping out the lyrics to make it more personal.

The second season's duet CD *Earth Defense Club DUET SONGS LOVE! Attack!* is another where the the cover art leans towards being staged. The Defense Club, plus Gora and Wombat, are balanced in a pyramid, for the most part facing forward. The background is white with pink hearts that have a 3D effect.

Once again, they could be somewhere that has a green screen. The reason this cover leans towards being staged is the chaos going on—Ryuu is distracting Io with his phone, and En is getting annoyed by Wombat crawling up his side of the pyramid.

The first track is *Brother Lover Rapper* feat. MC YOU MORE TONE & MC GO-Rap from KUROTAMAYU. Like their duet from the first season, the lyrics are heavily tied to Yumoto and Gora themselves, but it could also be their personalized version of an existing song.

The second track is *-Halfway-*, sung by Io and Ryuu. This song has no explicit connection to their characters, and could easily be a cover of an existing song.

Finally, there's *Festive Dazzling Days*, sung by En and Atsushi. Like Io and Ryuu's, the lyrics are not specific to the characters, even if there is the Doylist explanation by the lyricist that song is based on the thought of En and Atsushi's life after graduation.

Between the first and second seasons, the CD *Let's Go!! Love Summer ♪* was released. This consists of two songs, one being the

titular track, the other being *LOVE FRIENDS*. The cover consists of the Defense Club lying in the grass in their summer uniforms, similar to the opening credits.

For the most part, the lyrics of the titular album are listing generic summer activities. However, some of it again feels like it's the Defense Club covering a song with their own custom lyrics, specifically the part where everyone is panicking about Yumoto drowning. However, towards the beginning, the lyrics seem like a conversation. Yumoto leads, and then En joins in—though his only line is about the song being a pain, and he hands it off to Atsushi, who fumbles and passes it on to Io and Ryuu.

LOVE FRIENDS on the other hand feels like the Defense Club could be doing a straight cover of an existing song in-universe, with the only alteration being the banter in the middle. The original version that they're covering could have had a long instrumental for that part, or some other banter that they decided to replace with their own.

The first season's opening CD *Absolutely Invincible☆Fallin' LOVE☆* features the

Defense Club lying down in a circle on a white backdrop, all making the sign for love. While the lyrics utilize "love" a lot and bring up hot springs a lot, the song doesn't explicitly mention the Battle Lovers. It could easily be a one-hit-wonder in-universe. *Just going now!!* doesn't mention either of these. However, it is also utilized in the season two finale, when the Battle Lovers sing it. This could mean it's an existing song they have done for karaoke before, or the power of love is willing them to sing together, similar to how the Lovracelets make them say their catchphrases.

The first season's ending CD *I miss you 3 Meters* features the student council standing together over a golden background, with blowing wind. The lyrics describe Kinshirou's feelings about the distance between him and Atsushi, but they don't mention specifics. This could also be a song in-universe, possibly from a romance movie. On the other hand, *We the Righteous Caerula Adamas!!* is tied tightly to the plot of the anime. However, since the Conquest Club's manga is shown in the anime, it's entirely

possible the council commissioned a theme song in preparation for their rule over the world.

The second season's opening CD *Boiling Point Breakthrough☆LOVE IS POWER☆* features the Battle Lovers on a striped background, posing for the camera. The song once again utilizes the word "love" and the concept of baths, but still doesn't specify the Battle Lovers. *Boys Go Straight* has no mention of love or baths at all.

The CD for the OVA's opening and ending is *Eternal Future☆LOVE YOU ALL☆* and features the Defense Club standing in a circle or heart shape, hands joined to also form hearts, over a white background with cherry blossoms in the air. The opening, yet again, is heavy on the use of "love," and also mentions a bath and heroes once. However, it is still not specific to the Battle Lovers. The ending, *From Both Our Hearts*, also has "love" brought up a lot of times in the lyrics, but has no mention of baths or superheroes. Instead, it leans into being a song of saying "goodbye."

It is not necessary to cover all the VEPPER songs individually, as the canonical

reason to them existing is that the twins are idols who sing them, and magazines with all three CDs' art are shown in a store in the second season's finale. However, there was a missed opportunity in the second episode for the twins to introduce themselves using the lyrics of *WE ARE GALAXY IDOL*—excluding the end credits, the only songs with CD releases that they sing in the anime proper are ☆Star☆the☆VEPPER☆ and *Pure Revolution D.F.G.*

It should also be noted that all of the songs from the second season that are tied closely to the characters singing do have another possible Watsonian explanation aside from being personalized covers would be the songs were commissioned by the twins for everyone to join them in concert.

Now, onto the next generation of magical boys, the Happy Kiss and Edelstein knights. This season's songs do not have as clear cut of a Watsonian explanation. For starters, the album art for the character song CDs *Happy Kiss SONGS Happy&Set!* and *Edelstein SONGS Die Verwandlung!* do not have the same feeling of peeking into a scene not shown in the anime proper, and instead gives the

feeling of the boys being told to pose for covers. The same can be said for the opening and ending CDs, except they're in their magical boy outfits. As for the duet songs CD, microphones, tambourines, and headphones are present, but the staging is not natural—instead of placing the eight characters in a scene where they're doing karaoke, they are placed in a grid reminiscent of *The Brady Bunch*.

The songs for this season are also much more specific to the plot and characters. The easiest song to apply a Watsonian lens to is *HAPPY READY?????* as it is a magic-induced song in the series. On the other hand, *Ole! Noblesse Oblige* runs into a couple issues—it is about a student council referring to themselves as the Conquest Club. The original student council, Caerula Adamas, referred to themselves as the Conquest Club in the anime proper, while if memory serves, the Edelstein student council did not. While it is possible this could be another song commissioned by Caerula Adamas that Edelstein stumbled upon and covered, there is another possible explanation that will be

delved into once all other songs are discussed.

Absolute Happiness☆*HAPPY KISS*☆ and *We Are the Noble Edelstein* namedrop the knights' team names in the title and lyrics, with the latter stating in the first line "We are the Furanui Knights, Edelstein!"

Kyoutarou's song *A Voice Heard Before Bed* is a song with deep roots in his character and why he sleeps a lot during the series, whereas the outside perspective of this is given in Ryouma's song *Oh Say Cry?* Nanao's song *Sadistically BE HAPPY*★ is the easiest song from the CD to give a Watsonian explanation, as it is simply from the perspective of someone being a tease—though the fact it uses the word "happy" puts it on thin ice. Taishi's song *THIS IS THE MANZA!!* Is from his perspective of hiding his past delinquent self. Finally, in addition to matching his speech pattern, Ichiro calls out for Taishi at the end of his song *Dash! Dash! Dash!*

The lyrics of Ata's song *A White Rose Blooms* lean heavily on how he feels towards Kyoutarou during the series, ending with his Edelstein name, Ritter Diamant. Like Nanao's

solo, Taiju's song *Good Day, Bad Day* could be a song that exists within universe, but also leans he feels towards Ata, though it doesn't have anything plot-specific. On the other hand, Martha's song *Eat It! Fattening Butter!!* is extremely specific to the series, including namedropping.

The duets *Trust You* (track one) and *The Hands of the Clock Pass Each Other* (track four) between Kyoutarou and Ryouma and Kyoutarou and Ata have enough benefit of the doubt that they could exist within universe, though they do have strong ties to the characters' relationships.

Track two is Taishi and Ichiro's duet *Obstinate Rivalry Everyday!* Aside from saying each other's names towards the end, it could pass as an in-universe song.

Track three is Nanao and Taiju's duet *When We Smile, the Feeling Is Mutual*. This song could also fall into the category of being an in-universe song they are covering, but has even stronger ties to the plot, referencing conversations they had in the anime proper about the conflict between their teams.

Finally, Martha's duet with Magozaemon, *Slap! Stick! Pig! Butter! Martha vs Magozaemon*. This duet is the one that ties the entire Watsonian explanation for all of this season's songs together. It would be impossible for Martha to sing this live, as there are times when both voices are singing. The answer to how this is achieved is shown in the CG concert—Magozaemon is shown as a separate person from Martha.


Therefore, all the songs from this season of *Boueibu* must have a magical explanation. In the final episode, it is shown that the Happy Braces and Edelstein rings have been removed. Without getting too in-depth—another essay has been written on the topic—it is possible the removal of these transformation devices took some of the magical boys' essence with them. Then, for whatever reason, Karurusu and Furanui put on a concert with simulacra of their knights, the songs acting as windows into their souls.

To summarize, the vast majority of songs from *LOVE*, when paired with their album art have plausible Watsonian explanations as being songs that the boys have done for

karaoke, or are original VEPper songs. The songs that do not fall into this category could be existing songs in-universe, but the boys change the lyrics to fit them when singing their covers, with one big exception being the song that name drops Caerula Adamas. In this case, it could be a song they commissioned.

The songs from *HAPPY KISS* do not have as clear cut of a Watsonian explanation, as they are tied tightly to the characters and also name drop the magical boy teams Happy Kiss and Edelstein. In addition, there is Martha's duet with the past's Magozaemon, which would be physically impossible without magic. Therefore, it is highly likely that all of the songs from *HAPPY KISS* have some form of magic involved in their creation.

It will be interesting to see what direction the theme for the movie will go in, as it features the entire cast as a unit. Already, the album art appears to be a callback to the *HAPPY KISS* duets CD, with a grid of all the characters. From the preview, the word "love" is utilized heavily. Because the title of the movie is *Eternal Love*, it would be fair to predict



the lyrics will fall into the pattern of the songs from *LOVE*, where it could exist in universe. However, it is still too early to tell.

A Theory on How the Transformation Trinkets Work in Boueibu

(Feat. RobiHachi, Fairy Ranmaru, and Delusional Monthly Magazine)

Erika

Technology—it is constantly evolving. However, certain aspects stay consistent between different iterations, as familiarity helps with the user experience.

There are many similarities between the different items used for transformations in *Boueibu*. In addition, there are similarities with the transformation items from other Umatani series, as there is an overlap in the creative teams. These similarities allow for connections to be made, allowing viewers to fill in the gaps for themselves.

This essay will discuss these connections, and formulate a cohesive theory as to how the transformation items work.

The Lovracelets, Caerula Adamas rings, and twins' items provide the mosaic for censorship when transformed, as well as heightened abilities. The Lovracelets, and presumably the others, have the placebo effect in place for injuries. This placebo effect can also restore any damage to the costumes, as shown in the first season's finale, where Atsushi has a tear in the back of his shirt that is not seen later. Keeping in mind that these are props for the entertainment industry, this feature is similar to restoring costumes and makeups between takes of filming a television show.

However, it is possible that the placebo effect isn't just for injuries and mending the outfits, but to restore the users to a certain state. If someone were to go through physical changes throughout the years, and then transform, they would be reverted back to the "save state" of when they first received the transformation device—specifically, their age.

In the case of the Battle Lovers, this would not be the first season, but the second season, since they received their True Lovracelets with updated uniforms.

Caerula Adamas received their rings in the first season—which from here on out will be referred to as "Conquest Rings." Even though their outfits changed for the second season—as, again, their rings are props and linked to the fact "everyone gets a new transformation in the second season" according to Wombat—their save state would be from the first season. In addition, the More Better forms would have either had to be programmed into their rings from the start, or the rings had a software update in the finale, prompted either by the Battle Lovers transforming, or by someone working on *Can I Destroy the Earth? Returns* that saw how the show was turning out and decided this was the best course of action.

The twins' have a few possibilities for what their items could be. The obvious would be the scarf rings with their symbols, the sun and moon, respectively. Throughout the second season, they are also shown transforming with microphones. This could be part of their theatrics, since most of the time they are on stage to transform, but in the New Year's episode, they have them when transforming outdoors at the shrine. Then,

in the OVA, the twins hold up their calligraphy brush and bonsai sheers before transforming, though this may be coincidence from the way the scene is cut. It is also not known exactly when the twins received the ability to transform. They are able to perform many skills while not transformed, since they went through a lot of training to be idols from a young age. It is possible their ability to transform is a recent development, especially since there is no change in appearance or age between their civilian forms and VEPPER transformations.

From what has been revealed of the movie in the trailers and frames, a lot of this is backed up.

However, Gora in his Maximum Gorar outfit looks...different. There is a frame that has been revealed of him not transformed, and he is very beefy. There are also a couple frames of him transformed, and he still has those proportions, while the outfit itself remains unchanged.

In present day—the first season through the OVA—he has a square chin, and this is the same in the second season's flashbacks. On the other hand, the first season's flashbacks

gave him a pointier chin. All of the flashbacks have him clean-shaven. In the movie's screen shots, he has a square chin, but he has his beard.

This can be explained by his transformation using an older technology that doesn't utilize save states. Instead, his transformation only changes his clothes, not accounting for his changed proportions.

The Happy Kiss and Edelstein knights use a similar concept, but first it is important to note the similarities in fashion. Karurusu and Happy Kiss have outfits that have similarities to the Battle Lovers—Karurusu especially. His outfit has black trim similar to the first version of the Battle Lovers' outfits. The same can be said about Furanui and Edelstein's outfits. The part that hangs down strongly resembles the front of the Caerula Adamas outfit, and the outfits as a whole have the same color scheme.

In addition, the Happy Braces have a slight resemblance to the Lovracelets in use a white bracelet, jewels in the character's assigned color, gold trim framing the jewel, and wings that hint at the season finale's

power-up-butterfly wings in this case, as opposed to angel wings.

The Edelstein rings have an even stronger resemblance to the Conquest Rings—silver, with light green gems. It is also interesting to note that these don't appear to be removable, unlike the Conquest Rings. The finale power-up of becoming Super Happy doesn't need an explanation of a software update being sent to Edelstein's rings—this time around, it really is the power of happiness spreading and giving everyone wings.

As the fights between Happy Kiss and Edelstein are not for a television show, there is no need for the mosaics censoring the knights' faces, and instead Karurusu restores everything using Happy Powder.

Returning to how the transformations work, it is possible they also utilize some sort of save state, but in a more magical, non-technological way. It is highly likely that the knights will have the same non-aging property as the Battle Lovers et al. Because the outfits resemble the Battle Lovers and Caerula Adamas uniforms, and Karurusu has been shown to have knowledge of Earth

culture, it is possible the brothers were inspired by *Can I Destroy the Earth? Returns* in the creation of their knights' transformations, recreating them through magic. It is funny to think of both brothers choosing to use it as inspiration without knowing what the other had planned. Because they weren't on good terms at the start, it's not like they coordinated their knights' outfits together.

It is also important to note that the Happy Braces and Edelstein rings are removed at the end of the series. Because the transformation items are able to save the transformation internally when not in use, it's possible they could also save the knights' civilian forms. This explains Magozaemon's appearance in the CG concert—it makes sense that this is how the past version of Martha appear, with the two of them singing together and standing next to each other.

As an aside, there is also the matter of how the monsters' transformations work.

In Maximum Gorar's era, they acted like a costume that the human was in, which needed to be sliced open. This mirrors the costumes

used in live action *tokusatsu* shows, and balances the idea that Gora's transformation uses an older version of the Lovracelet technology.

Regarding the monsters that the Battle Lovers fight in the first season, each one is struck by a Zundar needle, leading to a black, vein-like light appearing on their skin. At one point, Zundar states that they're wasting his "precious Zundar needles," implying they are a natural occurrence in his biology. However, after it is revealed that everything was for *CIDER*, Caerula Adamas is shocked when Gora is turned into a monster, stating that they thought they were the ones with the power to make the monsters. While it is possible that the needles are a part of alien hedgehog biology, it is also possible that these needles are props, just like the Lovracelets and Conquest Rings.

Kinshirou's transformation into Dark Aurite could either be an upgrade to his Conquest Ring, similar to becoming More Better, but there are also couple frames accompanied by screen shake where he could be getting hit by a Zundar needle. In

addition, there is a dark aura around him similar to what surrounded a few of the monsters.

In the second season, the monsters are created when the twins throw Dadacha at the face of a student. Since Dadacha and Zundar are brothers, it is possible some aliens have a genetic predisposition to making monsters. There's also the matter that he was once thrown at Yumoto's face to show a flashback. However, all of the monsters are created in the VEPP Theater, specifically when the student—or students, in the case of the Valentine's episode—are sitting in the designated chair.

There are two options for how monsters created by Zundar and Dadacha work. The first option is an actual change in the students' physiology—their DNA is actually changed into a monster, or alien. The second option is the monsters are advanced special effects, like some sort of solid hologram that envelops a student's body. In both cases, the Love Shower or True Love Fountain is needed to wash off the foreign DNA or hologram.

As for the monsters that the Happy Kiss knights fight, they are created in a visually similar way to how Caerula Adamas creates monsters—the trio stands in a circle, each saying part of a chant with the last being in unison. This sends a beam of energy from the center of the circle to the student, creating a magic circle where he stands. Two more magic circles rise into the air, one above his head and the other at the midpoint. There is a bubbling of energy, the student screams, and they are transformed into a monster. Each monster has the Edelstein shield somewhere on their body, giving unity to all of them. In addition, this signifies that the magic used for creating the monsters is similar to the transformation magic for Edelstein, as the knights also have these shields and Ata transforms into a monster.

The theory of how the transformations work extends to other Umatani anime, and is important to keep in mind when thinking about how they work.

In *RobiHachi*, while the only “transformation” is the merging of two ships to become Hizakuriger, there is the

Akafucrystal, which has the canonical property of bringing good luck. It is possible that it could have additional properties, such as being used as a conduit for transformations. While the Happy Kiss knights’ transformations are magical, the Battle Lovers’ use advanced technology, meaning the gems on the Lovracelets are either there for decoration, or serve a purpose similar to crystals found in circuits.

In *Fairy Ranmaru*, all of the fairies have some form of jewelry, and it’s possible that in addition to their transformations being save states of their fairy forms, they go a step further. There is a flashback where Hojo tells the Queen “I found Betelgeuse,” while showing only the ring after the fight with Sirius. It is after this that Ranmaru introduces himself as Ranmaru, not Betelgeuse, and is shown without his glasses as well as having had his memories wiped. In addition to having his memories wiped, one of his wings is damaged.

However, this isn’t quite a *Madoka*-situation, where the gem in the jewelry is the fairy. Sirius first had a ring, like

Ranmaru, but it appears he has a necklace with a small charm when he goes by Chiruka. It's possible his ring was damaged or he left part of himself behind, as his fairy-form is different. There is also the case where Hojo was given his pocket watch by the Queen, and that's what he uses to transform. It is fair to say that the fairies' jewelry acts as a USB or other storage device that can get damaged—causing file loss or corruption—and because the fairy-form is dormant when a character is in civilian-form, the reverse is also true, and conservation of mass comes into play.

The Queen is the best example of this. As a little girl, she has long hair and a complicated outfit, whereas when she is in her true form, Procyon, her hair is shorter and she has a large chest.

Finally, in *Delusional Monthly Magazine*, the characters that are reincarnated Motarians have their respective MOParts that are needed to transform when not on the Mo Continent. Each MOPart has a colored gem, and the part needs to come in contact with a specific body part.

This is similar to the Battle Lovers, where they need to kiss the Lovracelets to transform. By extension, the Happy Kiss knights transform by kissing Karurusu's hand, and the Bar F fairies lean in and kiss the air in front of their clients' lips, aside from the time they kiss the Queen's hand.

The MOParts are one of the few instances where a phrase never accompanies the act of touching the transformation item. These phrases are "Love making" for the Battle Lovers; "Conquest" for Caerula Adamas; the song ☆Star☆the☆VEPPER☆ for the VEPPER; "Now, make your pledge with a kiss," said by Karurusu for Happy Kiss knights; "Die Verwandlung," said by the Edelstein knights; and "I'll save your heart," said by the Bar F fairies, which is then followed by a song after the transformation and as the wings appear.

The MOParts were also stated to be an advanced, ancient technology, which feeds into the theory of transformation devices acting as a storage device for a save state. Of course, the physiology is so different between the human- and Motarian-forms, that

the idea of conservation of mass discussed for *Fairy Ranmaru* is disregarded—though it is connected to *HAPPY KISS* with Karurusu and Furanui's human- and animal-forms having the same size-discrepancy.

To summarize, transformation devices in not only *Boueibu* but all Umatani anime behave as storage devices, such as USBs. When in civilian-form, the transformation is stored in the jewelry or other item, and when transformed, the opposite is true. Most of the time, a transformation is a save state created from the first use of the device, with the transformation not only changing clothes, but changing the user's physiology to match how they were at the save state's creation. A transformation is triggered most commonly through touch, often paired with a phrase. There is the potential for transformation items to be damaged, in which case it may affect not only the appearance of the save state, but cause the erasure of memories. Transformations can receive upgrades or adapt to the situation if it calls for it. When removed, a transformation item may also have the ability to create a clone or clones of its

user, including past versions from before the first transformation.

In conclusion, a lot of this essay may be disproved when the movie is released, especially since it takes from other Umatani anime, but judging from the previews, there is a chance that it may still be valid.

The House Hunters

Cool Mom

"Do you really think it's necessary to bring the kids along?" asked Kinshirou, buckling in the last of the septuplets.

"Sure!" said En. "They're smart enough to have some input. Besides, we need to get them out a bit more. Mac is starting to look a little porky."

"I heard that!" Macaron threw back. "It's just that Auntie Koya and I have missed a couple Mommy and Me Yoga sessions."

"Hmm." Kinshirou reached up Mac's sleeve and removed a box of strawberry Pocky.

"Check his other sleeve," said Newt, Mac's fraternal twin. "He is hiding more contraband."

"Traitor," muttered Mac as he was divested of the rest of his secret stash of sweets.

"Are we ready?" asked Io, walking up to the limo bus Ibushi had splurged on for the Yufuin/Beppu clan. Kinshirou had stopped using the Kusatsu name, after discovering he had been kidnapped as a newborn from a hospital in Helsinki and that the Beppu twins were his actual siblings.

"I think you'll like the homes I selected

to tour," said Io, finding a seat on the bus. "I gave the addresses to your driver."

"All I ask for is a quiet neighborhood and a hammock tied between two trees," said En with a yawn.

Kinshirou made a "tch" sound as he handed out juice boxes to the boys. "We need a large yard, at least six bedrooms and four full bathrooms, a large kitchen with a restaurant-grade oven/range, and a walk-in freezer wouldn't be a bad idea."

"Wow, you really have given this a lot of thought!" exclaimed Io. "The first property is not far from the university. You DO plan to continue pursuing your degrees, right?"

"Kin-chan insists on it," said En with a sigh. "Here we are with a disgusting amount of money from Kin-chan's inheritance of the Kusatsu fortune, and he wants us to finish our education."

"Fortunes are won and lost," said Io with a nod. "Kinshirou-senpai has the right idea."

The luxurious bus pulled up to the curb. Io glanced out the window. "We've arrived at the first house," he announced.

They piled out of the bus in front of a large, traditional Japanese mansion. It appeared to have seen better days, but Io assured them the interior was spectacular.

Kinshirou looked askance at the exterior which looked like it suffered from a serious

case of rot, but Io assured him it was not ready to give up the ghost.

"This house has stood for hundreds of years," he said confidently and he slapped a supporting post which shifted under the impact of his hand.

"I don't want the boys endangered," Kinshirou replied in alarm.

"Let's see the inside," En insisted.

They were not disappointed; while keeping to the traditional style of the home, the previous owners had made serious upgrades in the kitchen and bedrooms. En was enthusiastic, but Kinshirou was still skeptical.

"There ARE six bedrooms, but two are the size of closets," said Kinshirou. "And the dining area won't accommodate the family."

En was enamored of the bathrooms which all had large soaking tubs. "I know where I'd be spending MY time," he commented.

"Next," said Kinshirou, steering En toward the exit. Most of their tribe pattered after them. Newt looked over his shoulder and noticed his twin standing in the doorway to the dining room.

"What's wrong, Macaron?" he asked.

"Don't you see them?" Mac replied pointing toward the far wall.

"There is nothing there," said Newt, beginning to feel a little edgy. Mac was always loud and obnoxious, but now he looked wide-eyed and terrified.

"They are pointing back at us," whispered Mac. Newt grabbed his brother's arm and hauled him outside.

"We definitely don't want this house," Newt announced, climbing into his car seat. "Uncle Yo was right when he said it hadn't given up the ghosts."

His parents looked at each other and shrugged in complete incomprehension.

"On to the next house," said Io, cheerfully.

The next address was the furthest out from the university, but Io promised them the commute would be worth it.

"This house has EIGHT bedrooms, a dining room that could better be described as a banquet hall, and an ultra-modern kitchen," said Io. "There are six full baths and a hot spring-fed swimming pool..."

"Next," said Kinshirou quickly.

"But..." En began.

"Next," repeated Kinshirou with finality.

"Did I mention the pool is fed by the Mount Binan hot spring?" asked Io innocently.

"NEXT! NEXT! NEXT!"

En slouched in his seat as they drove on to the third and final house. "I don't see why we couldn't have just taken a quick look," he muttered.

"Take a quick look around you," said Kinshirou, waving a hand. "Three innocent dips in the hot spring on Mount Binan and we came home with twelve sons!"

"Maybe we could try a different hot spring," said En brightly.

"The next property has a hot spring," said Io, "but it doesn't have a direct feed to the house or swimming pool."

Kinshirou looked hesitant.

"It's NOT the Mount Binan hot spring," Io added quickly.

"C'mon, let's look at it," coaxed En.

"The commute to the university is reasonable," said Io. "There are seven bedrooms, four full baths, a large eat-in kitchen with brand new appliances...and wonderful neighbors."

They pulled up to a gated estate with a tree-lined driveway.

"Now this is more like it," said En with approval.

Kinshirou looked up and down the quiet street. "Wait a minute. I know this road. Naruko, doesn't Arima live next door?"

"I'm not sure," Io replied, looking at his shoes.

"He DOES live next door!" said Kinshirou with a scowl.

"That's a good thing," said En. "Just think - the boys will have easy access to their Uncle Bu."

"So will my mom when she comes to visit," muttered Kinshirou.

"Oh. Ohhh! Listen, Kin-chan, the past is the past," said En. "Arima is a good friend who happens to have a past with your..."

"Shall we go in?" interrupted a frantic Io. "You're going to love the peace and quiet. There's twenty-four hour security, so you won't have to worry about the boys..."

Chevy leaned over to Enka. "I can bypass the system - no problem," he whispered.

The house, or rather mansion, was set on a small rise, surrounded by manicured lawns, gardens and fountains.

"It's February, so we can't take full advantage of the gardens," said Io, leading them to the impressive front entrance. "Wouldn't this be a great place to celebrate the triplets' first birthday? It's next month, isn't it?"

Enka, Maury, and Chevy looked more like three year olds and acted like thirty year olds, but thanks to the magic of Mount Binan's hot spring where they had been...

spawned, they had developed rapidly and were showing increasing powers on a daily basis. En and Kinshirou were crazy about all their boys, but the eldest three were taking on the striking features of their parents. Enka looked like En with his slow smile and sleepy, though slightly shrewd blue eyes. Maurice and Chevalier were carbon copies of Kinshirou, but Maury had En's inclination to drift off and Chevy had inherited En's playful side.

Io opened the front door and the group stepped into a beautiful yet simple hallway.

"I like it," said Kinshirou. It's elegant without being pretentious."

As if on cue, the boys kicked off their shoes and ran, splitting up into smaller groups.

"Now what do we do?" groaned En.

"They can't get into trouble," said Io. "There are no open elevator shafts or vaults or subterranean caves for them to fall into. Let them have fun while we do a room by room tour."

Mac and Tai, one of the septuplets, made a beeline for the kitchen and scouted out the pantry for snacks. Maury carried Tamago up the stairs to a bedroom for a quick cat nap. Chevy and Enka found the security system and

discussed how they would disconnect it permanently.

The others explored the family room, library, and spacious bedrooms, no one finding fault with any of the home's features.

Only Newt ventured into the gardens, frisking about until he reached the property line. He squeezed through a thick hedge, grimacing at the scratches he received, but he was a toddler with a purpose.

"Bu-Da?" he said aloud.

"Newt? What are you doing here?" Arima Ibushi reined in his horse at the sound of his name. Newt ran up to him and wormed his way up Ibushi's leg until he was astride the horse.

"We are house hunting, and if things go as planned, we will be neighbors," said Newt with satisfaction.

"Neighbors?" Ibushi's mouth dropped open.

"Oui! I could see you every day!"

"That would be great," Ibushi replied, "but I wouldn't count on it. I'm not exactly on your Daddy's favorites list at the moment."

Newt made a dismissive gesture with his hand. "Bah! You mean your past with isoäiti? C'est une petite histoire de coeur! These things run their course and before long, everything will return to normal."

Ibushi almost choked. "Sometimes I forget you have the intellect of an adult," he

said. "I hope you don't talk that way in front of your folks."

Newt slipped down from the tall horse and transformed into his teen form the moment his feet touched the ground. Ibushi gazed down at his near twin. Newt looked about sixteen.

"No worries, Uncle Bu," he said, dropping the French accent. "In their eyes I'm just their precocious multilingual genius." He stretched his arms over his head. "Ah! It feels good to be able to take this form! I was feeling a little cramped!"

Ibushi looked over the hedge. "Well, it looks like you'll have to change back. Your folks are entering the garden."

Newt sighed before resuming his diminutive size. "Well, back to being petit moi! Au revoir!" He slipped through the hedge and strolled back to the house.

Ibushi continued his leisurely ride; Newt had given him an earful! He wondered whether Kinshirou would really seriously consider becoming his neighbor. A month earlier, Kinshirou had been ready to murder Ibushi over his unexpected affair with Kinshirou's mom and the discovery that Ibushi was actually Kinshirou's father.

Ibushi gazed wistfully over the hedge, catching sight of Kinshirou admonishing Newt for running off. No, he thought sadly, it's probably not a good idea living next door to your son.

Newt raced back to the house where Kinshirou was waiting with folded arms. "Newt, haven't I told you many times that you can't wander off alone?"

"I wasn't alone," said Newt airily. "Bu-Da was out riding on the other side of the hedge, so I was perfectly safe." He was treated to the sound of Kinshirou grinding his teeth. "Don't you think it's time you gave Uncle Bu a little breathing space?" he asked when he had composed himself.

It was Newt's turn to scowl. "Bu-Da is my savior. HE didn't abandon me on Mount Binan and leave me at the mercy of the hibagon clan."

Kinshirou paled. "How...how could you say such a horrible thing? Papa and I did NOT abandon you!"

"What's going on here?" En appeared in the doorway with a septuplet under each arm. "What's this talk of abandonment? Kin-chan... you're not LEAVING me?"

"Oh, please! Newt is trying to guilt me," Kinshirou replied. "This is the first property I've liked and I'll have to deal with Arima being next door. He's...he's like a vulture!"

Newt stamped his foot. "Bu-Da is NOT a vulture! He...he is like a noble peregrine falcon!"

Kinshirou leaned down until he was nose to nose with Newt. "You are walking a fine line, little man. I can have your Uncle Io find you a time out corner."

Newt's eyes blazed like blood, and Kinshirou drew back out of fear. He had never seen Newt in such a passion.

"Let's join the others," he said cordially, "and we can both think about our words."

This seemed to satisfy Newt and he re-entered the house. Kinshirou slumped against the door frame.

"Wow!" said En. "He sure put you in your place!"

"I'm the parent here," retorted Kinshirou. "Right? Right?"

Upstairs, the boys had already selected their bedrooms; the largest bedroom had been grabbed by the septuplets; the triplets had selected a slightly smaller room with easy access to the stairs; and the twins had chosen a room with a view of the Arima property. Newt had no qualms about the candy pink wallpaper which had sent Mac into raptures.

Io led Kinshirou and En upstairs and through the remaining rooms.

"Well, what do you think?" Io asked.

"I think we should make an offer," said En, nudging Kinshirou. "We've been a burden to the Hakone family long enough."

"I agree," said Kinshirou. "I suppose I'll have to overlook the Arima aspect and concentrate on making this place our home."

Several weeks later, En and Kinshirou moved in with the boys. All the uncles, with the exception of Ibushi, were on hand to help with the move. There was little furniture that had to be transported, and several suites of furniture had been included in the sale.

The boys busied themselves unpacking their clothes and toys. Kinshirou took charge of the kitchen, unpacking new cookware, dishes and cutlery. En had made himself scarce and had found an out of the way corner to catch a few zees.

Newt neatly stowed away his clothes and nipped outside to explore the grounds. He peered anxiously through the hedgerow, hoping to catch sight of Ibushi. Glancing in the direction of the house, he made up his mind to take action. In the blink of an eye, he transformed into a green pony and disappeared among the verdant shrubbery.

On the other side of the hedge, Ibushi was occupied with breaking the lingering ice on his koi pond. He trailed his fingers across

the surface of the frigid water and a few fish rose to the surface in greeting. It escaped his notice that Hireashi was among them.

Ibushi was slightly depressed; Kinshirou refused to answer any of his calls and it had been a while since he had seen his nephews. He was struck by the irony of having them right next door and being denied visits. He wondered how long Kinshirou would hold a grudge against him.

"Bu-Da, why do you look so sad?"

Ibushi looked up sharply upon hearing the sweet, slightly French-accented words. A very small green pony with large burgundy eyes was gazing at him with head cocked to one side.

"Newt? I hope you're here with your parents' permission," said Ibushi.

"Bah! Just let them try to keep me away from you," snorted the pony named Newt. He trotted forward and leaned his full weight against Ibushi's leg. "I grow weary of this ridiculous feud."

"I'm not feuding with anyone," replied his uncle, regaining his balance and patting Newt's unruly mane. "Your daddy is feeling hurt and just needs a little space right now." He hoped he sounded convincing.

Newt twitched his tail in thought. "Could I perhaps come over and watch isoäiti's show with you?" he asked.

"I don't think that's a good idea," said

Ibushi. "You'd better head back. Your folks will be looking for you."


Newt reverted back to his child form.

"Uh, Newt, where did you leave your clothes?" asked Ibushi.

"Oh, they are just over there somewhere. No worries! I can just levitate to the other side to avoid scratches." Newt skipped away and disappeared over the hedge.

Hireashi had surfaced and was leaning on what could only be termed a chin (if koi had chins!) with one of his strangely morphed fins. "Interesting," he said to himself. "Our Silver Chevalier seems to be leading a secret life. I thought he looked familiar... That episode of 'Bijou Koukou Kaseibu Love' that Zundar and the dratted censors wouldn't air..." Hireashi drummed his frond-like fish fingers against his non-existent chin. "I wonder... Could I get Zundar or his brother Abokado interested in a NEW drama...something a little risqué, perhaps...? A forbidden love that stretches across decades...hearts shattered by separation...and perhaps throw in a love child or two...or even TWELVE!!!" He laughed diabolically before sinking blissfully into the depths of the koi pond.

Truth be told, if Hireashi had his druthers, the cameras would keep rolling indefinitely. He was always looking to cap-



ture that moment of tension and conflict between these silly Earthlings. That Kusatsu Kinshirou...now there was a bundle of sexual tension that had been waiting to burst! Andromedans were fascinated by overt emotion and Kinshirou had delivered over and over again. Hireashi wanted a new star and he had his sights set on Arima Ibushi. He wondered how he could lure the lovely Venla back into the limelight; she was still under contract, but she was a clever girl and knew how to negotiate.

Hireashi swam in circles. Perhaps Arima's little shadow - that strange French-speaking child could be used as a go-between...

“What *Boueibu* Means to Me...”

Ah, my senior year of high school. I first saw a post about *Boueibu* on Tumblr in 2014, reblogged it, then forgot about it until I think two or three episodes had already aired in 2015. And from that point on...it has changed my brain chemistry. Some people count sheep to fall asleep at night—I think of alternate universes where En and Kinshirou are in love.

My love for this series has helped me improve all of my creative skills in these past ten years. I've written fics, drawn art and comics, posted many theories, and edited numerous AMVs. To some extent, everything I've created has acted as practice for other, non-fandom projects, like school assignments and my own published magical girl novel.

Flash forward to 2025, and I now live, breathe, and sleep not only *Boueibu*, but the other existing Umatani projects as

well—*RobiHachi*, *Fairy Ranmaru*, *Delusional Monthly Magazine*, and *Remote Host*—and I have a whole conspiracy board to connect all these continuities, as well as an on-going fic series that is soon going to encompass them all.



Of course, none of this has even touched on the amazing friends I've made online because of the *Boueibu* fandom. Since graduating high school, and then college, schedules for hanging out with the circles I went to school with have been overlapping less and less. However, because I'm in the *Boueibu* fandom, I don't feel alone. Everyone is so warm and welcoming, and collaborating on this zine has at times felt like we're all in a big rec room working together!

~ Erika / Deuterium51614 / MythicHunterz

I got into *Boueibu* at around 2016. I remember that by the time I had finished season 1, season 2 had already been announced but we hadn't gotten a release date yet. I was in my first few years of middle school back then.

I got into it because, at around that time, I started to question why there were no anime about Magical Boys, despite so many of the classic Magical Girl franchises having them as side characters (like *Sailor Moon* and *Cardcaptor Sakura*). I ran into *Boueibu* through a very simple "magical boy anime" googling, and that one google search basically changed my life in a way...

Watching *Boueibu* was what made me first get inspired to properly start learning how to draw, it also largely inspired me to make more of my own Magical Boy OC stories. I spent a good time lurking on Tumblr, and eventually at around 2017 I made a Tumblr account 99% because of *Boueibu* fandom.

Being shy (and tbh pretty awkward), I didn't interact with people much back then and mostly stayed as a lurker except for making some fics for *Happy Kiss Week* back in 2018. But I feel just that lurking was enough to make me say I am glad I ran into *Boueibu* fandom back then, because the specific people I followed reblogged stuff that really helped me basically throw away any tiny traces of anti-ship mentality I had back then. Considering how other modern fandoms are, I do feel that was a very important formative moment in my fandom life.

Boueibu already had special place in my heart for those reasons, even if at around 2019 it was mostly dormant. And then... 2020 happened. Like many, I was in a very bad place mentally and emotionally. At some point, some people were making posts about trying to revive the fandom, and I



very clearly remember running into one of those posts while I was mindlessly looking for something to watch on Crunchyroll. So I decided, "why not rewatch at least the first season?" And right at episode 1 I instantly felt better...

That year ended up being the year I finally felt like I was actually connecting with people in the fandom, as I was participating in plenty of the events that were organized that year and getting a little less shy about talking to people. And honestly, ever since that year I've never let go of *Boueibu* again. Even when I have new interests I get excited about, it doesn't feel like *Boueibu* has ever become as much of a dormant interest for me as it was back in 2019. And it's definitely a combination of it generally being a series I really love and the people I have met because of it (shout out to Adri, Venla and Midori, as I feel those are the three mutuals I am the closest with around here ♥)

God, I could probably go on for even longer, about how wonderful I think it is that we still have people trying to keep the fandom alive despite the many years of 0 new canon material, or go even more in depth about how important I think *Boueibu* is to my passion for Magical Boys in general, or talk about how passionate I am for *Happy Kiss* specifically... But I'll hold back on that. I feel I'll just keep talking forever unless I stop myself, haha.



I am really looking forward to this new era of *Boueibu* with the upcoming movie and game. And I hope to be spreading the word of what a wonderful series it is for many more years to come. Here's to much more Love ♥ in the world and more Happy ★ moments!

~ Serenity

I'm not good with words, but I just think the show is fun and made some good friends because of it <3

~ Pink Fluffy Dragon

Most people apparently know me due to being hyper-fixated on this show since it aired (well...finished airing as I forgot off and on about watching this show after ep2 aired in Jan. 2015 and then in March 2015 I watched the last ep finally a day or two after it aired). This show came around in one of the worst times in my life, after my mom passed away in February 2015, this show ended up turning into a giant comfort series for me, as I feel if I am to let go of this show, I am to let go of the thing that kept me sane during this time. In these ten years, I have been making fic after fic, a giant AU, my OC Araki, and many, many events such as this zine, which was in the works for a few years even before I (with some help from others) decided to do it for the tenth anniversary. I have since been dubbed the CEO and President of the Western *Boueibu* Fandom by some. This fandom is one of the best I've ever been in and I have always wanted to be part of such a great somewhat close-knit fandom. Some featured in this zine have been my friends for nearly ten years now (some I've just recently met) and I am so happy to have met them. These people in the fandom have witnessed growth, ups and downs, dozens and dozens of head canons, theories, art, stories, cosplays, and whatever else there is to see this fandom has it. Words truly cannot describe how I feel but everyone in this zine/fandom (even those who wished not to participate) have a safe space here and it's just beautiful.



This show has brought me comfort, brought me to tears, made me mad, made me happy, made me just so angry because something like the infamous s2Ep4 was a thing.

In short, *Boueibu* to me, means happiness and love. Watching *Boueibu* is like being in a big warm blanket in a warm, cozy room. If you're sad, watch *Boueibu*. If you're mad, watch *Boueibu*. If you're so bored that you can't do anything, watch *Boueibu*.

I'd like to thank everyone who helped make this Zine possible, a big thanks to all the creators, my mods (Erika, Serenity, and PinkFluffyDragon), and an even bigger thanks to Erika who helped with the formatting. Love is never over and I am so glad to be in this small fandom. See you for *Eternal LOVE*! And hopefully much more!

~ Adri ♥ / KoolKitty9

This is going to sound very cheesy but to me *boueibu* quite literally means love and happiness. Through watching and then writing fanfiction for it I've met amazing people. Not only that but through it I've gotten closer to my life partner, they are my best friend and we've since been through many other fandoms and other situations together.

Boueibu was also comfort. When season 1 aired I was still a college student just restarting college because I still didn't know what to do with my life. When Love season 2 aired I was thriving at my internship and when *Happy Kiss* ended I was graduating and if I remember right, just starting my next job. (still my job to this day). These magical boys were there for me to laugh at and care for through that and because of that I will always love them.

So really Love is never over.

~ magiccatprincess



For me, *Boueibu* is more than just a parody anime; it was the light of a difficult time in my life. I have been in the fandom since 2015, where I have met great people and learned to love myself.

Kinshirou and Atsushi are the ship that I fell deeply in love with, and they settled in my heart forever. They prove that if you are willing to accept your mistakes and be a better person, you deserve to be loved.

~ Lidoxia

when i watched this show, my heart became full of little akoyas, and i loved them all very much.



i loved them so much that i had to let them go out into the world to find love from someone else, without knowing if that someone else would ever be there.

it was very difficult and very, very painful. but i learned from this that only by risking this pain, is it possible to be loved.

i also learned that the heart cannot take this pain over and over. so it is important to pour time and energy into building relationships with people you love, so there will be people who love you in return.

through akoya, i was able to love and be loved. i am very grateful to everyone who saw the love in my akoyas and returned it.

a part of my heart is in every akoya i draw, and akoya will always be a part of mine.

~ ripsensei

Boueibu's a very foundational series for me. It gave me tastes in media i didnt even know I wanted, and its allowed me to meet so many amazing people. it came at a time I was still taking animation classes, and it means alot to me as an artist and got me interested in who the people making these shows were. Without it I might not have decided to become a storyboard artist. It's also the fandom I've been in the longest and really learned how to participate in fandom.

~ Lauren

Boueibu came to me in my last year of high school. Final exams in Finland are in March, so that's a perfect time to get your soul sucked by an all-consuming obsession. The last episode aired the day of my French final, I doodled Kinatsu on the draft sheet instead of focusing lol (still passed.)

Boueibu got me to writing fanfic during the following spring and summer break, and I also give it credit for my art skills improving rapidly in the space of, like, two years.

I made my first internet friend through *Boueibu*: met a girl on a Finnish forum who was also watching it and we got to talking. She took me to my first anime con, and we still meet up and hang out sometimes! That makes her my oldest friend I'm still in regular contact with. I have her and *Boueibu* to thank for getting me into cosplay as well!

When I didn't make it to university, I was torn between a two-year community college acting course and a one-year Japanese language course; *Boueibu* mobile game not having an official English translation was what tipped the scales in favor of Japanese. *Boueibu* and its fandom were there with me when I was nervous about moving into a new place and meeting new people, and stayed a stable when I did make the greatest of friends ♡

I got into actual college the next year and moved again, and *Boueibu* was something to fall back into in that first, rough autumn.

I've gotten so many new experiences thanks to *Boueibu*. Fandom friends evolved into Actual Friends, so to say. It gave me a community I never really had before, and haven't had since in other fandoms. Even if *Boueibu* isn't at the forefront of my mind anymore, its impact should never be underestimated, nor can it be forgotten. Eternal Love ♥

~Venla / venlamiila / thatlittledandere

So... *Boueibu* came to me at the beginning of 2015, when I was moving forward from an awful year and thinking I have found out the greatest group of friends ever. I remember that in that first week of January 2015 one of them said as a joke we should watch it and cosplay them, I immediately claimed the 'azulito' (little blue guy LOL) since I've seen an edit of Haru from *Free* as En-chan sooooo... I remembered the first episode let me like WTF is this, but 2 weeks later me, my little sis and one of those friends were completely in love with the Anime. We had a group chat in WhatsApp in which we used to talk about the episodes and the upcoming cosplay, well almost all of us, my exbff hated *Boueibu* a lot and she hated Atsushi so much... It's not even funny to remember tbh... However, at the end, she also participated in that cosplay group which believe me when I say that cosplay group was kind of cursed... But we were so determined to do it that we accomplished to finish it in 2 weeks. That first year we tried so many things, CMV, photoshoots, headcanon, etc. *Boueibu* allowed me to live the dream of having group of friends that I loved with all my heart and even if we don't talk anymore I still love them and the memories I have with them.

S2 came out and I felt a bit lonely since I was kind of the only one from that group obsessed with *Boueibu*, but... I didn't care as I REALLY need to talk about one of the biggest blessing *Boueibu* gave me, Umehara Yuuichirou. I remember in the first episode I thought En-chan's VA was actually Jun Fukuyama and when I read an unknown name I was like WTF, does this mean I'm gonna like another seiyuu???? And oh boy, it wasn't just like, I really appreciate Umeme and I will need probably more than 2 pages to talk about all what he means to me, but let me summarize it with this : when he was in the hospital

I cried for those 3 months and during June, during SolidS concert, I promised to myself I'll go to his return in the next SolidS concert and I did it... I went to Japan for 3 days just to see him on stage... He really is one of the most special 'things' that *Boueibu* gave me.

Maybe Ume-chan and En-chan are the reason why I don't really want to let go of *Boueibu* and the main reason why I was excited when I saw the announcement for the movie.

And maybe that was the reason why I also left the Fandom and tumblr when *Happy Kiss* happened, I sincerely apologize but ever since I was a little kid... I cannot bring myself to like what takes away from me what I love (latest example I stopped following SQS when they changed my favorite actor) still... I wanna apologize for abandoning everything for this change and kind of being a spoil brat during that time... But my heart belong to *Boueibu Love*... So... Maybe I should start bringing this down to a conclusion of what *Boueibu* means to me... Back then, 2015-2016, *Boueibu* was really love, laughter, being with the friends I appreciate the most in my life and feeling safe with them, in one word it was just love.

Right now, I feel it goes more into nostalgia, learning that good things doesn't last forever and that sometimes we need to learn how to say goodbye and being strong in our decisions. Nevertheless, I don't want to leave the most updated meaning of *Boueibu* to end in a sad note, because... It also means that we sometimes need to wait to reunite again with that happiness, cuz honestly I never thought about my boys coming back 10 years later, it also means that sometimes there are relationships that are stronger than time, or the fact that you can see the person face to face every day because I can say that *Boueibu* also gave me online friends that I appreciate with all my heart. I'm happy and proud to be a Battle Lover, I'm happy and proud to have created fics, fanarts and cosplays for this Fandom because it was always so full

Of love and always giving me the most sweet and lovely feedback in all those different artistic expressions. I wanna thank Adri because she got me here, because she always understood how I felt about *HK* and never pushed me away because of that all the opposite, she has always see me as part of the Fandom and has always been willing to make

collabs with me, thank you so much for being such a kind and lovely CEO for this fandom. Believe when I say I'm crying while writing this, because I love the memories but they are also painful, but I'm happy I'm able to share all of this with you. Thank you all for contributing to this zine for allowing me to be part of it and I just wanna end up by saying, Love is not Over 🍷💖💕💗💙

~ AngelLizz

Boueibu, to me, is just joy and delight and love! I was introduced in the spring of 2018, when I was already well into university, and bingewatched through both seasons of *LOVE!* plus the OVA in time to catch up on *Happy Kiss* and watch the last few episodes of it live as they came out. These magical boys bring me so much joy!! Legitimately the first piece of art I hang up every time I move is a poster-sized canvas print of that one official art of En, Atsushi, Kinshiro, and Ibushi under umbrellas, where Kinshiro and Atsushi are sharing theirs. I've convinced everyone in my life to watch this show, and even the ones who haven't know exactly what I mean when I say, "my magical boys". And that's always how I refer to them: my magical boys! I love that the show is silly and still heartfelt and every detail feels so deliberate. Magical girl shows are my absolute faves and *Boueibu* does such a perfect parody because it takes itself so seriously. Like we're doing something ridiculous here, but we're going to give all the main characters compelling backstories and emotional arcs. Meanwhile, the monsters of the week are going to be the silliest nonsense you've ever encountered. And it just WORKS. I love how the end of every season catches you with a surprise development that changes what you thought you knew, and makes rewatching the series so so fun! I just love them so much. Playing any of the opening songs physically fills me with joy! My heart rate picks up and I get so excited I have to get up and pace around or sing along or shake the shoulder of whoever I've convinced into watching the show with me! It's the ultimate pick-me-up on days when I'm feeling down.

And being in the fandom for the past six years has been SO FUN. *Boueibu* is the show that made me understand the appeal of fanfiction, because I got to the end and I needed more, I wasn't ready to let them go! So it's been amazingly fun to see all the fantastic stories people have written and the gorgeous art that people have worked so hard to make and to read the amazing meta analyses people write! I'm not always the most active in this fandom, but I love seeing the usernames of people I follow because of *Boueibu* and knowing that I'm going to see something that makes me so so happy!!! Love is never over!!!

~ Cricket

When I first watched *Boueibu*, I thought it was just going to be one of those anime that I just watch once then move on from forever. I didn't know some years after that I was going to rewatch it and fall in love with it all over again, and then some years after that I would do the same thing. Here we are 10 years later and it still gives me the widest smile with its songs and characters.

Even if I go for a long time without thinking about it, I'm sure when I look back they will still be there to cheer me up when I need it, just like they have last year, just like they have throughout this past decade. I hope to carry that for another 10 years from now, even when my heart gets heavy.

Truly, the Defense Club is a place of warmth and comfort where my heart is safe to feel all the happiness that it can hold and to let go of the weight it carries, even if just for a little while. I'm sure I will continue to Fallin' LOVE with this show that never fails to Make me HAPPY yeah!! whenever I'm down ♡☆

With sincerity,
endstarlight

As much my high school years weren't the best one thing I will always be thankful for is that sheer spur of the moment decision teenage me made of absolutely disregarding the order of my then anime list to watch *boueibu* right away (it was last in the list, if I remember correctly) because without out that I wouldn't be here. I don't really remember how I discovered this anime, I probably just randomly found out about it.

First season aired while I was in my first year of high school, this anime pretty much followed me through my entire high school years and thanks to it found amazing long time online friends as well it inspired me so much on my own creations. (It also kinda did a domino effect on me finding other long time friends and series I grew very attached thanks to the recommendation of a certain friend lol). Even with it's ups and downs in both this series and community, it will always have a special in my heart

So yeah, love is never over!



~ Mercy / Miircy